

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

# NAG

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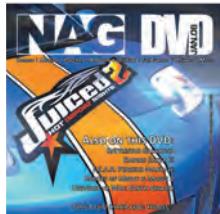
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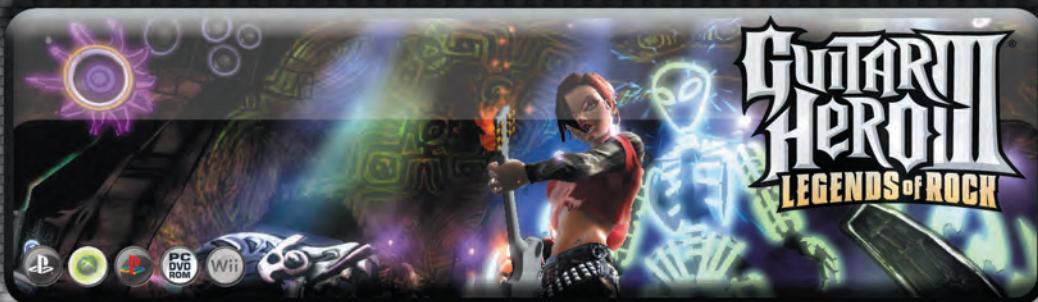
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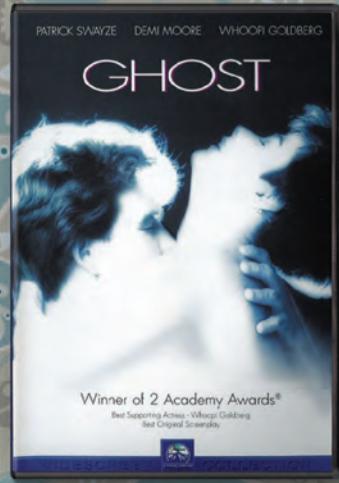
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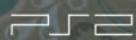
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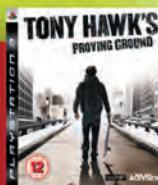
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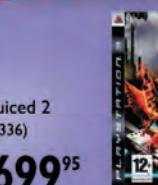
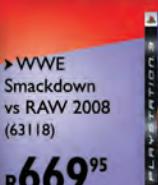
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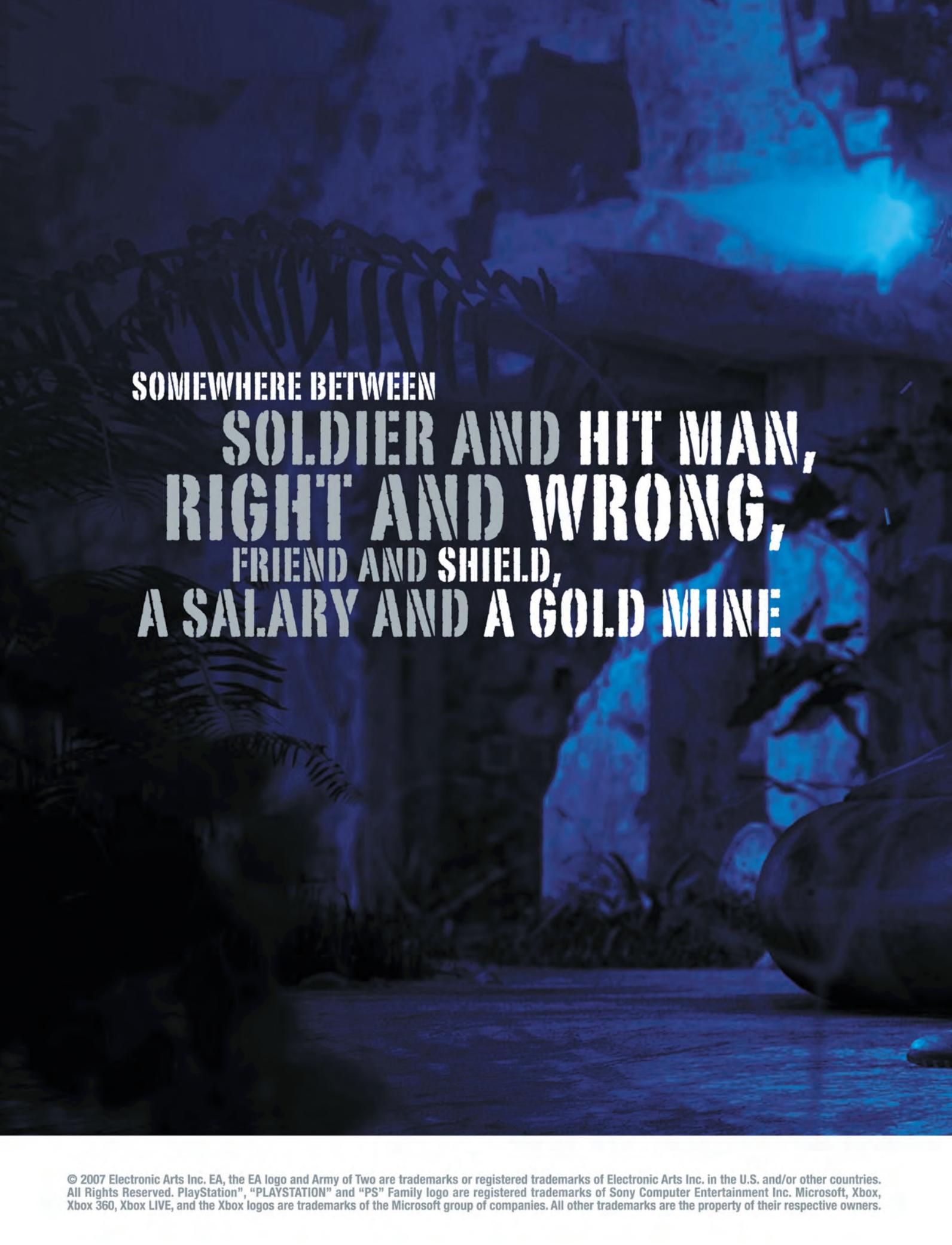
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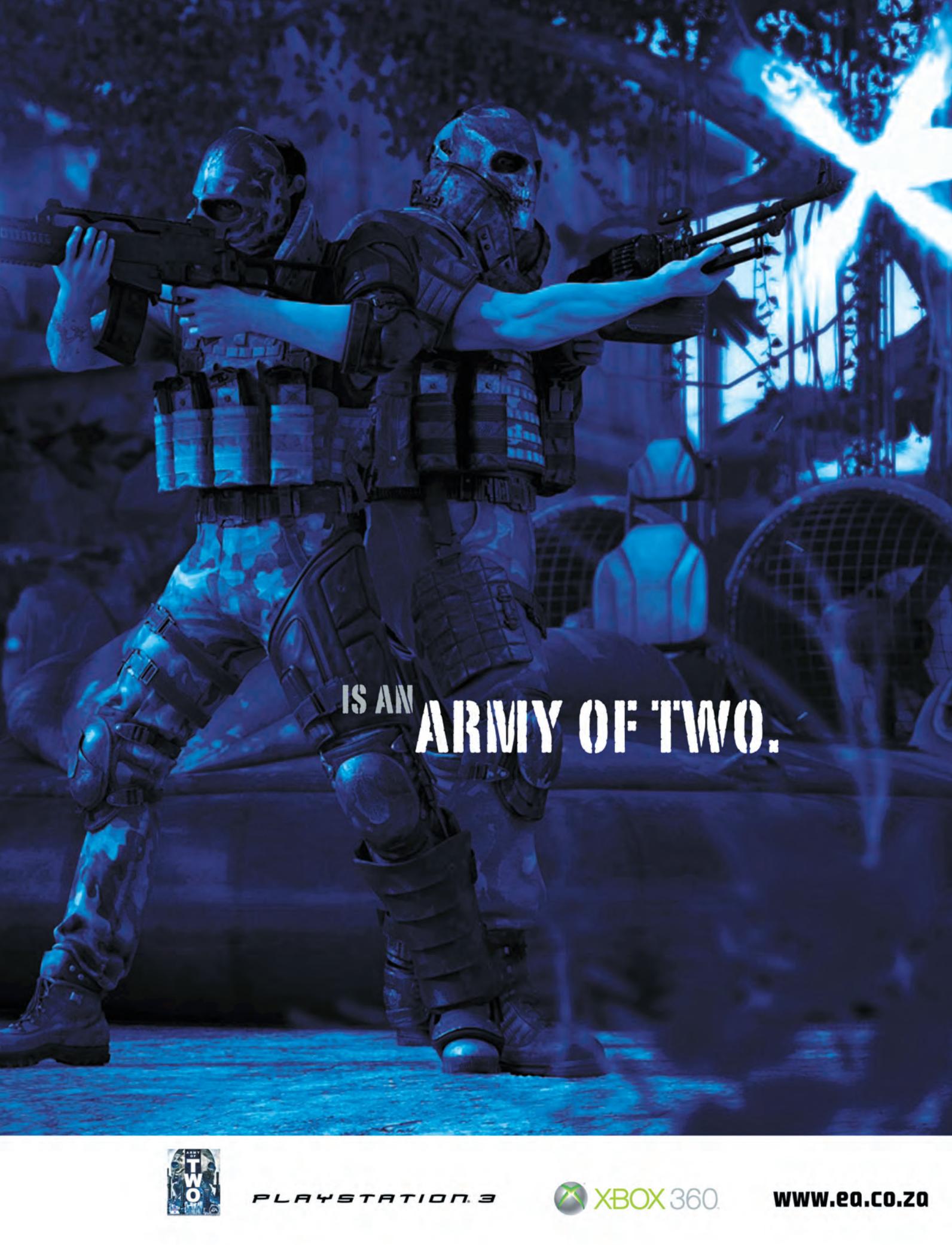
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# Prepare For Combat



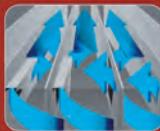
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**managing editor**

michael james  
michael.james@tidemedia.co.za

**editor**

james francis  
james.francis@tidemedia.co.za

**games editor**

miktar dracon  
miktar.dragon@tidemedia.co.za

**contributing editors**

regard van der berg

**technical writers**

toby hudson  
neo sibeko

**staff writer**

alex jelagin

**copy editor**

nati de jager

**contributors**

adam liebman  
anton lines  
bradley hatton-jones  
clive burmeister  
danny day  
eddie francis  
justin slabbert  
megan hughes  
russell bennett  
sean james  
tarryn van der byl  
walt pretorius  
alien scum

**sales manager**

len nery  
len.nery@tidemedia.co.za  
+27 84 594 9909

**marketing and promotions manager**

jacqui jacobs  
jacqui.jacobs@tidemedia.co.za  
+27 82 778 8439

**art director**

chris bistline

**designer**

chris savides

**photography**

dreamstime.com  
chris bistline

**office assistant**

paul noebele

**tide media**

p o box 237  
olivedale  
2158  
south africa  
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**subscription department**

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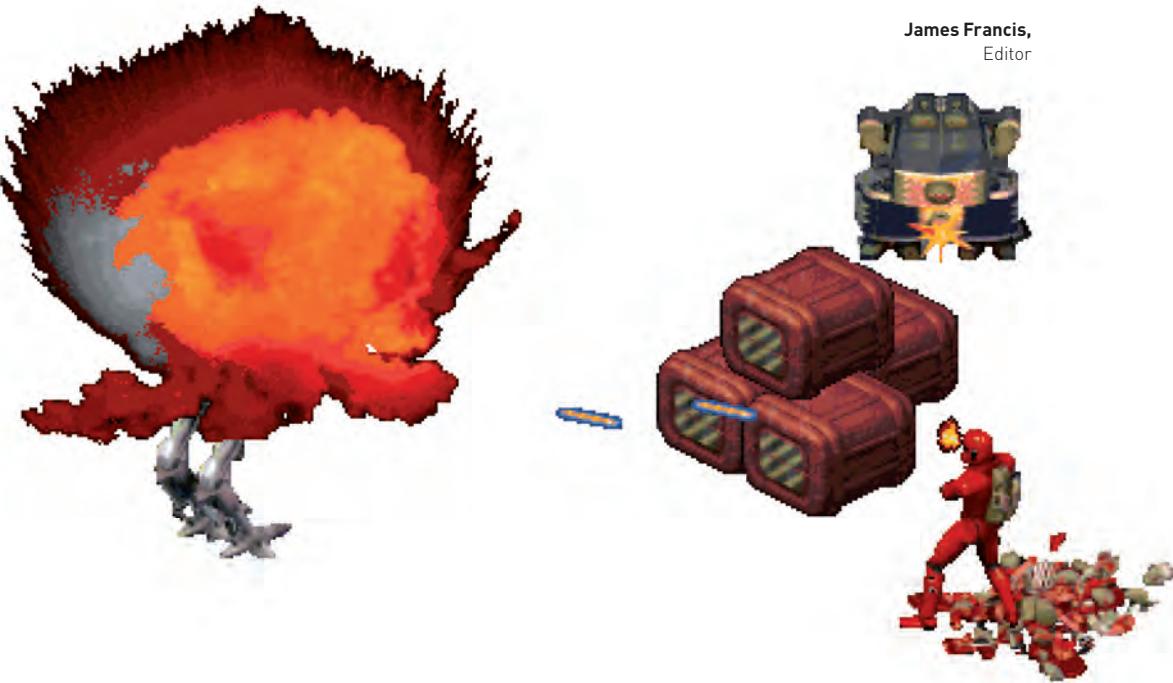
We're on holiday. We don't care!

**TOOK A BRIEF BREAK** from gaming a while ago and left a lot of it behind while I indulged in other interests. When the new generation started, I got back into it again; probably because I could get the one kick that was hard to afford on the PC – unbelievable graphics. That's something a lot of us look for in a game. Sure, a hardcore player, I believe, always looks for more and can approach a game with a practiced eye. There are also many different reasons why gamers dig certain titles. Some want the challenge, others want to feel bad-ass, others just need something that they can keep playing. But ever since we made the jump from one to two colours, we've been following that spark ever since. Look at *Half-Life 2*. I still have a vivid memory of seeing the game at E3 during Gabe Newell's presentation, three or four years ago. What we saw there was that spark. Today it's dated (but don't get me wrong – still excellent).

What about the more casual gamers or the people I prefer to call rogue gamers? They play seriously, but they do a lot of other stuff too. Most hardcore gamers become rogues. It's a certain luxury in life to be able to play games during every free moment that you have. Rogues also like the spark, but they are more patient. More casual gamers, I think, enjoy the experience. A lot of them might even be like the pre-graphics text adventures: who cares what it looks like, it's fun! These two groups are the main reason why the PS2 sold 120 million units. The same crowd gave the PSP its running shoes and catapulted the DS into the record books. They love them. They are also the people buying the Wii. How a machine can sell so well with a line-up arguably still as weak as the GameCube baffles me. No, wait, it doesn't. It makes sense. Playing on the Wii is an experience – and a fairly cheap one.

The fact is, there are a lot of PS2 and mid-range PCs out there. The PC market benefits a lot here: budget game sales in particular are strong sellers for the platform. But in the console market everybody seems to have caught next-gen fever. The real reason: the publishers are all focussing on the new machines, leaving the PS2 behind like yesterday's paper (good for a read or too still, but ultimately budgie fodder). The press and fans have to follow – you cannot write about PS2 games much when there isn't a lot to write about. Yet, at the same time, the next-gens are not near the PS2's fan base yet. So why is our industry this backwards? How does it manage to treat a 120-million strong platform with the same (or even lesser) gloves it uses on the PS3 and 360? Imagine a tyre manufacturer whose main business stopped being the millions of cars that it supplied tyres to, now instead making rubber for the new models (that aren't compatible with the old tyres). Counting the Wii, there are less next-gen consoles on the market than half the PS2s audience. So why doesn't the PS2 still have the bear's share of the console market for new releases? Studios have the trained staff, the dev kits, the experience... sometimes I think the gaming industry was born ass backwards and seems to enjoy that direction instinctively.

**James Francis,**  
Editor



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## LETTER OF THE MOMENT

**FROM:** Rameese Mathews**SUBJECT:** Gears of War & Smears of er... Microsoft?

**T**HIS IS MY FIRST letter to NAG even though I've been a dedicated reader for years – love the mag. Before I go on, I just need to add a caveat as this topic has more than likely been torn to shreds on forums everywhere. Still, seeing it in print would provide a certain degree of satisfaction to many, including myself. Here goes...

I bought Gears of War, Games For Windows version. The 360 version almost convinced me to buy one, but I'm an avid PC gamer so I upgraded instead. Now this is the fork in the road of this letter. To the left I start ranting about how INSANELY buggy this game is and how I've yet again wasted good money when I could just as easily have spent less than half of what I paid buying an illegal copy or downloading it myself. To the right (and this is what I'm leaning towards) is a statement of the current imbalance in the PC games market. The problem, simply put, is that there is no quality to be found anywhere, ever – at least if the game isn't made by Valve! I'm so sick and tired of buying games and upgrading my expensive PC only to be thwarted by bugs and poor design. Seriously, what gives? More than likely games are rushed out to beat competitors, but seriously, this lame excuse is true of every market in every sector. It is the nature of business to compete; this tenet in itself negates the excuse. Imagine car manufacturers releasing products as badly developed as the majority of PC games. Buy the car on Monday; patch the fatal airbag failure bug on Wednesday. If, however, you were mangled in a horrific wreck on Tuesday, sorry for you. The

difference is in how these seemingly different industries are judged. Strict laws govern the quality of automobiles; with PC games this is not true: anything marketed well enough WILL be bought and WILL disappoint. We allow this to happen. Next year's E3 will yet again see various execs from the MS giant stand up and spew sales statistics with pretty animated graphs exalting the majesty of their all powerful monument to consumerism, Microsoft. What those neat animations won't show is how the consumer satisfaction behind those sales is nothing to be proud of.

This being said, my request is twofold. (1) Dear NAG, please continue to review PC games with the utmost criticism of their stability as the absence of this factor alone will render it unplayable and is in my view FAR more important than any other criterion; and (2) don't buy Gears of War for the PC – it's a guaranteed waste of your money, and there's an entire online subculture emerging to support this cold hard fact.

*Ironically, the 'bugs and poor design' are often a result of the upgrade-crazy market that the PC gamers have created for themselves by buying pointless hardware improvements (that in turn confound and aggravates game development due to ever-changing hardware specifications) – but we feel your pain. Rushing the game out to beat a competitor's isn't as much of a driving force as you may think. If anything, the real problem lays entirely with the current publishing model: publishers and other game-development funding sources tend to put unrealistic milestones on the games,*



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**TOPIC FOR NEXT MONTH**

Do you have a next-gen console or PC yet? Or are you happy with what you have?

*or expect stupid restriction (copy-protection) and 'features' (un-skippable cut-scenes). Btw, strict laws govern the quality of automobiles to avoid loss of life – gaming hasn't killed anyone yet (except stupid people). Quite a lot of people on the NAG online forums are enjoying Gears of War despite the problems. However, fear not: NAG will remain the last true South African bastion of quality, honest and relevant reviews.*

**FROM:** Jayceé Lock**SUBJECT:** Games and Girls

**S**OMETHING I'VE NOTICED THESE past few

months is that all my friends go on about how great this and that's graphics is. Yes, the graphics is insanely good these days with HD and all, but how much pleasure will you get out of the game if you just stare at the screen, amazed at how good everything looks... I hope not much. I gave a random thought to this matter, and ended up thinking of games in terms of girls/guys (if you're gay or you're a girl). Just because she might look beautiful, doesn't mean that she's the love of your life. All you might get is a one-night stand and maybe a phone number. That's it. If looks are all that a game has going for it, it won't last very long – unless you like staring at a TV. Now, I'm not one to say, "Bring back the Golden Oldies," just that it's the inside that counts. A game should have good graphics, but gameplay, storyline; basically everything contributing toward a good game should come before graphical superiority.

*Astute observation, actually. Worrying, since the idea of 'one-night stand' games doesn't sound unappealing, but still a good analogy. If you had to take the analogy further, more is revealed it seems: If games can be compared to girls, doesn't that mean they cost too much and end up being more grief than they're worth? Do you get 'gaming bachelors' – guys who've 'sworn off serious commitments with games' because they prefer a quick fling with a casual game now and then? It certainly makes you rethink the term "casual gamer".*

**FROM:** Rian Voster**SUBJECT:** Gaming, festive season and theft

**G**REAT MAGAZINE, I HAVE been buying NAG for five years now and have never missed an issue, even though I don't own a console, PC or any game-related devices or software. (Hey, you don't hear of fans like that everyday.) The fact is that I love games. I like reading about them, listening to them and looking at them. Two weeks ago, I decided after many months of research to buy a PlayStation 3 console, two PS2 titles and four PS3 titles (it added up to about R9,500). After, I witnessed *God of War 2*, *Shadow of the Colossus*, *Oblivion*, etc. An alien world of twenty years of untapped glory opened up. The feeling was a lot of fun; I must have felt like a Koi San when he first had a strawberry milkshake. But when I came home the one afternoon, I found that my jobless brother had sold some of our household belongings including my new PS3. My short gaming life was now crushed and I will not invest in it again, except arcade machines at Joe's Takeaways. Perhaps this is a test to see if I can endure and truly be a gamer. My friend's computer got nabbed the other day as well. So, a little advice for all gamers: try and keep your gaming equipment safe and locked away over the

festive season. Put it in a save place if you're going away. There cannot be a bigger crisis when your new DirectX 10 kick-ass computer and your copy of *Crysis* get stolen. Keep on gaming!

*When we were younger we would also paw through the gaming magazines of that era, daydreaming about playing the games contained in the pages within. Being a gamer is a magical thing, unlike anything else. You gain wisdom, knowledge and power through games. You should will the untimely demise of your brother, by the way. Just keep concentrating on his forehead and imagine you're giving him cancer.*

**FROM:** Twitch M**SUBJECT:** Ramjet made sense? WTF?

**F**IRST OFF, GREAT MAG guys (and gals)

– always bought it since I dunno when. I think it just gets better every month. But last issue shocked me a little bit. As always, I was reading the opinions section of NAG and I came across Ramjet's page. Normally I read his page because it's good for kicks and sometimes a wise word or so, but I never really expected what he said – this time about the stereotypes of online gaming and his excuse for not playing. At first, I

**A game should have good graphics, but gameplay, storyline; basically everything contributing toward a good game should come before graphical superiority.**

HOT stuff

# ASUS EAH3870

**HD 1080p Videos and DX10 Gaming Graphics**

## Real-life Visuals with Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts

Experience high definition graphics like never before with ASUS' new EAH3870/G/HTDI/512M and EAH3850/G/HTDI/256M graphics cards. Supporting the latest generation of AMD Radeon™ HD 3800 chipset, they provide HD Gaming and HD video beyond 1080p quality, and come bundled with the popular DX10 game, Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts.

## Realistic Graphics with Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts

Enhanced lighting effects, mission persistence, improved AI, enhanced physics and a dynamic weather system provided Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts with a whopping amount of detail and realism that left me shellshocked. This second part of the highest-rated strategy series reveals moodier graphics and environments, and with the EAH3800 series' powerful graphical performance, gamers will be in for a full visual feast.

## Great HD Enjoyment with Advanced Graphical Efficiency

Both graphic cards come with the new 55nm chipset design, and allow users to experience high-end graphical performances while running more efficiently and quietly than before; while DirectX® 10 support provides enhanced 3D graphics and shading effects from the latest games. With PCI Express® 2.0 support, processing power and throughput is effectively doubled in comparison to current AMD PCI Express cards.

## Fine-Tuned HD Images with New Splendid Technology

The new ASUS Splendid Video Intelligence Technology utilizes the GPU Pixel Shader to reduce CPU loadings; and allows ASUS' graphics cards to finely adjust Full HD images to deliver vibrant visuals in conditions most favorable to the human eye. This makes watching movies on the PC as good as watching them on top-of-the-line HDTVs. Splendid is also the perfect companion to AMD's Avivo HD technology – providing hardware acceleration for video decoding.



## ON THE FORUM

**QUESTION:** *Ghostbusters* is coming! What other movies or shows would make interesting or good games?

**ArtofDutch:** The A-Team

**Magon:** Equilibrium!!! (shout like Leonidas would and do it in slow-mo)

**Darkmag:** Stargate, without a doubt.

**Gargamel:** Thundercats.

**Repline:** An RPG crossed with a castle management (simulation) style game based on the book series "The Sword of Truth" – Terry Goodkind, with open-ended play and a kick-ass skills and magic system. Command the armies of Dhara; make alliances and defeat the Imperial Order.

**Jedi:** A game based around the TV series *The Shield* could be quite enjoyable – make it an open style type RPG, very much like the *GTA* series of games, where you could decide on which laws to uphold and which laws to break.

**BlazingNferno:** The Matrix RTS (but it must be set in the 2<sup>nd</sup> renaissance era from *Animatrix*). It would rock.

**Mad Don McKilt:** A 28 Days Later survival game would be interesting. And maybe even a Reboot game?

**Siphothergrey:** *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz*. Enough Said!

**someonelse:** Arrested Development the RPG!

**PloPshoP:** I would just like to see a proper *Transformers* game. That half-assed attempt released a couple of months back shouldn't count.

**dolfieman:** Sin City – Nice black & white cell shaded game oozing with high contrast colours where needed... Oops, there goes my jaw again!

**Ruandre:** Apocalypto, as a stealth-survival game akin to the *Splinter Cell* series, with a dose of parkour action (à la *Prince of Persia*) added for good measure!

**echo:** A good *Jurassic Park* game. Please?

**FIRECAT:** If anyone remembers a TV series called *The Invisible Man*, so like a *Max Payne* style game, but with invisible and slow-mo abilities.

**kHayne:** *Farscape* done by Bioware as a single player party based RPG. Now I think about it, that's basically what *Mass Effect* is... Or mayhap as an MMO.

**Have your say on the NAG forums:**  
<http://forums.tidemedia.co.za>

## Why do developers of games punish consumers by adding in security measures that clearly just frustrate and have no real benefit as they are easily cracked?

scoffed at the negativity – "Oh, come on, it aint that bad" I thought, and quickly forgot about the whole incident and read the previews for upliftment. Some time later, I started playing my newfound addiction, *Team Fortress 2*, which, as far as I'm concerned, is the best game on the Net right now. And then it hit me like a dead ostrich: some guy was calling someone else a noob every time he killed him (the first symptom of pure Steveness). This soon got on my nerves and for some reason the game wasn't fun anymore because of some cretinous Steve. Later even more started showing – the same guys whom I originally had fun with! I cannot believe that some social reject who thinks he has something to prove by blaming his teammates every time he dies and calling everyone else noobs took my whole experience of joy away. It's ignoramus like these who take the fun out of everything and just lead to less online SA players. The reason why games are made is so that people can have fun – not for some jackass to demonstrate his ego. So, I found myself reading Ramjet's opinion page again. At least one thing is certain: I'll never name MY son Steve!

*These colourful online characters make it the proverbial cacophony bouquet of fun it is. However, where we differ from Ramjet's jaded pessimism is that these people (and we use the term loosely) don't take the fun out of everything, or lead to less online SA players. If anything, people like you should simply not take the "Steveness" lying down. You have to fight for your right to party.*

**FROM:** Krüger Otto

**SUBJECT:** In-game advertising

**RECENTLY INDULGED MYSELF IN** a game called *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*. I couldn't believe it when I found an in-game message, posted to all players, stating that a game being published and soon to be released is on its way. That's great and all, but why do I want to know that? I purchased the game to play it. Not to read on about some other game being published in America. Conclusion? I think advertisements should be left on billboards and on the television. Not on my computer. And what if the game becomes old? Would the ad still claim some game is in development? Krüger Otto is demanding justice in the gaming world!

*Yeah, well... you're preaching to the choir, dude. Nor are you really saying anything particularly new, interesting or special. Next you're going to tell us that murderers shouldn't kill people – it's just wrong. Publishers will always try to punt their newest product lines through their existing established product lines till the sun burns out. It's sad, but if you really don't like it, vote with your wallet and stop buying games from publishers that do it.*

**FROM:** Alan Anstey

**SUBJECT:** You want me to do WHAT?

**THANKS FOR AN EXCELLENT** mag – my monthly soul food.

I must confess that I have been forced to buy pirate goods. Before you shoot me down let me explain. I have bought two games recently – *BioShock* and *The Orange Box* – and when I discovered that I had to activate them online, I threw my toys out the cot and tried to get a refund.

As I was leaving the shop, a little bird whispered in my ear that I could get hassle-free, Internet-free and frustration-free copies at my local flea market. I am now the owner of copied versions of *BioShock* and *The Orange Box* and what do you know – it is hassle free and Internet free.

Why do developers of games punish consumers by adding in security measures that clearly just frustrate and have no real benefit as they are easily cracked? And worst of all, 'force' those law-abiding citizens into buying pirated copies if they don't have a high-speed Internet line. Am I forced into getting an ADSL line I don't want. Is this the future of PC gaming? Don't these developers realise that they are not curtailing the problem, but that they are perpetuating it?

If this is the case, then I fear for the future of us PC gamers in developing countries where the Internet is expensive and cumbersome.

*The future of PC gaming is certainly one with much more integrated online functionality and anti-piracy (until the publisher fat-cats wise up, at least). The Internet is the hottest thing to hit the planet since breathing and everyone wants in, plus it's not all bad. If you don't have ADSL, all this new 'must verify online' crap does suck, but when you do have ADSL, your access to more gaming goodness broadens dramatically and the issues of online verification mostly disappear. The trick here is to ensure that you get ADSL as soon as possible. Or give the Americans a reason not to be online.*

**FROM:** Jon Monsoon

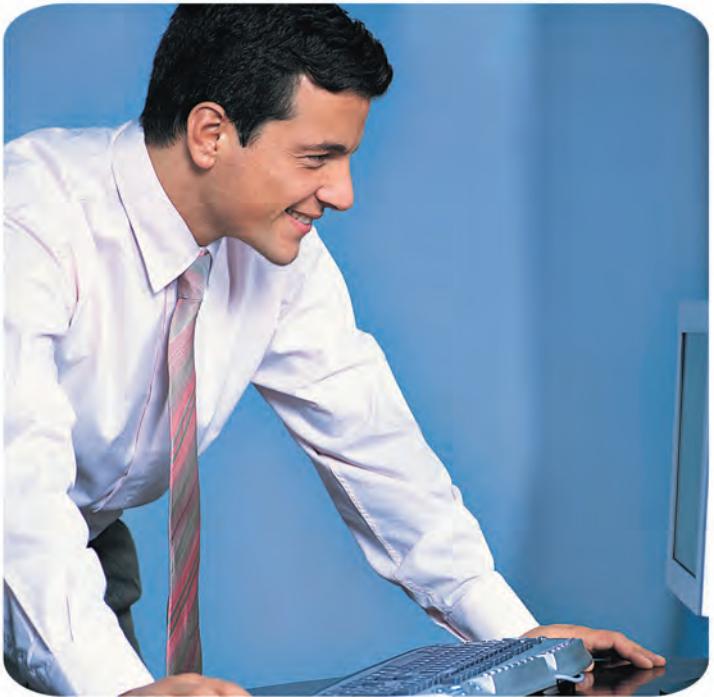
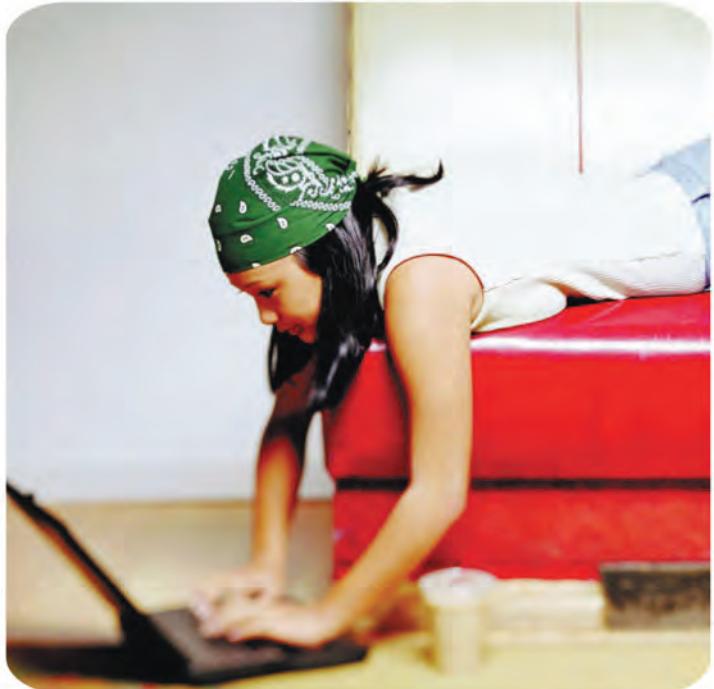
**SUBJECT:** Editor Conversion 1.0

**MY NAME IS JON** Monsoon (author/journalist/editor/Malcoholic). I have recently been appointed Tech Editor at one of the magazines I work for and am delighted to have games and gaming included within this dubious job description. Prior to this 'promotion', I was a lesser Music Editor (meaning, all I wrote and cared about was music). My new position requires me to know a bit about gaming and a lot about new gaming technology. So far, I have been able to wing it, with the help of some very knowledgeable heads in the industry and the generosity of distributors. I attended *Age* and was quite 'blown away' (that's a gaming term, innit?) by the sheer size and scope of your industry. It puts the rum 'n' powder music industry to shame! I was amazed to see young people actually happy to pay money (!) for games and game accessories (probably with all the cash they've saved from not buying music, one must assume). I also got handed a free copy of your fine mag and devoured it on the plane back home afterwards (not literally mind you, although I was hungry having not had enough money to buy a soggy cheese sandwich onboard). Now, I have seen your mag on the shelves before but have always ignored it as I scanned for the more expensive music mags (which have taught me nothing in 15 years!). Anyway, my point is that I am very glad to have made your acquaintance and will be referring to your mag wildly from now on for the what's up, word up, get up and shuddup on gaming and games technology! Viva you guys!

I look forward to your next issue with equal enthusiasm and wanna say Big Up for providing a valuable, interesting, readable and pretty-to-look-at resource, making even wannabe gamers look good.

*"Blown away" is not an exclusive gaming term – it was probably uttered by early rock-eating man during a strong wind, but we'll forgive you. Glad you like the magazine, we're quite fond of it too. We honestly do try to put out a hip, trendy, informative and utterly digestible magazine each month and letters like yours confirm that we are indeed tasty. We're glad to have made your acquaintance as well, and will be referring to you for ego boosting and generally pleasant commentary about the magazine. NAG*

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# THE SALES WARS

**WITH ALL THE NUMBERS** flying around everywhere, it can be a daunting task to track who is selling what, when. Thanks to recent global price cuts and Thanksgiving weekend in the US, November proved to be especially active. First there was the shocking news that the Xbox 360 outsold the PlayStation 3 in Japan, but Sony's console soon got its own back by outselling both other platforms in Japan for two weeks. But the real success story there was the PSP Slim, which has hit a million sales, thus far out-pacing the original PSP's sales rate. But the dirty fighting was left for Thanksgiving weekend, a crucial time for console and games manufacturers. Not surprisingly, the

360 took a solid lead in the US, prompting Microsoft to announce that it has outsold the PS3 by three-to-one. Sony disputed this; even though the 360 outsold the PS3, Sony's console sales surged between 245% and 300% (depending on who you believe). That places the PS3 in the same position the 360 was a year ago. If anything is clear from the latest statistics, it's that this generation's consoles are not likely to show a winner any time soon – even in the handheld arena. The good news is that players can expect a lot more games as the major companies fight for domination. Games, in the end, always determine the winner and nobody knows that better than Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo.

7 Nov	PS3 sales drop in the UK
9 Nov	Thanks to <i>Ace Combat 6</i> , the 360 triples its Japan sales, outselling the PS3
11 Nov	The PS3 sells more than 100,000 US units in one week
16 Nov	The Wii regains its US sales lead over the 360
16 Nov	The PS3 hits the 100,000 unit milestone in Australia
16 Nov	360 sales fall by nearly two-thirds in Japan
16 Nov	Surging on a new price cut, the PS3 outsells the Wii in Japan
23 Nov	The Wii hits the 200,000 milestone in Australia
23 Nov	Nintendo's DS reaches the 20 million milestone in Japan
23 Nov	The PS3 outsells the Wii in Japan for a second week
23 Nov	360 sales in Japan are up marginally
26 Nov	The new PSP Slim hits the one million milestone in Japan
27 Nov	Games and console sales surge 134% in the US during Thanksgiving weekend
27 Nov	The DS sells 200,000 units in the UK in a week
29 Nov	The 360 sells over 360,000 consoles in the US over Thanksgiving weekend
30 Nov	The DS sells 116,000 units in Japan in a week

## GAMING KNOWS ITS ABCs

**NINTENDO, THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE** of Aerospace, and education resource developer, Nortel LearnIt, have joined forces in an initiative aimed at incorporating science, technology, engineering and maths into American elementary and middle school curricula. Only, instead of textbooks and smudged overhead projector transparencies, they're going to do it with *Pokémon*. In the course "Master the Science... Master the Game", students in grades 3-5 will join *Pokémon Diamond* and *Pearl* in a whirlwind adventure across time and space, and hopefully "learn 21<sup>st</sup> century science using 21<sup>st</sup> century tools with characters they know".

In the meantime, Darmstadt high school in Germany is negotiating a licensing agreement with Crytek for use of its cryENGINE 2 for their game development, animation, video production, and sound design courses.

Finally, a Spanish research team is asking PS3 owners to donate their machines' downtime to compute all sorts of complicated biomedical simulator stuff on the PS3GRID network. Check out [ps3grid.net](http://ps3grid.net) for information on how your console can help save the world.



## MASS EFFECT ALIEN LESBIANISM UNBANNED

**DUE TO "LESBIAN INTIMACY",** *Mass Effect* was banned by Singapore's Media Development Authority. The exact nature of the scene involves a human woman (the player) and a female alien. Players can choose to be male or female at the start of the game; the alien remains female. The woman moves closer to the alien, the music gets porno and they head offscreen. You don't see anything. The ban has since been lifted and the game given an M18 rating.

Singapore has previously banned titles such as *God of War II* and *The Darkness* due to nudity and religious expletives, but traditionally allows games with graphic violence to be sold with consumer advisory labels.

In related news, *Soldier of Fortune: Payback* was refused classification by Australia's Office of Film & Literature Classification (read: banned). Activision modified the game to meet the OFLC standards, which gave it a MA15+ (read: unbanned). All the ultra-violence and dismemberment was removed.

# BOND IS BACK

**D**ANIEL CRAIG DIDN'T WANT to be involved with any *Bond* game, because they were generally rubbish. The world's current 007 favourite went on to explain that he didn't have a choice in the matter, though, as his contract expects him to be a part of it. Thus, he told the developers at Activision to make sure it's good. Luckily Activision's CEO, Bobby Kotick, agrees. At a recent conference, he called the franchise one of the biggest in videogames, particularly thanks to the excellent *Goldeneye*.

"I think the key to re-energising the *Bond* franchise is going to be ultimately the highest possible game quality." To bolster this claim, he added that, unlike EA, Activision has the best teams on the job.

## LICENSE TO GAME

WHILE ACTIVISION MAKES BIG PLANS FOR 007, WE HAVE A LIST OF HIS MOVIES WE'D LIKE TO PLAY...

### Diamonds are Forever

The first 'behind the scenes' Bond game. Play as Sean Connery and go around, pinching the interns, drinking lots of whiskey and laughing loudly every time you remind the producer what they paid to get you back.



### Her Majesty's Secret Service

If you walk George Lazenby's Bond off the side of a cliff more than a hundred times, the game should give you a 2,000 point achievement or something.



### Die Another Day

Bond usually works alone, so if the developers allowed it, you could skip the cut-scenes where any of the characters say anything. This would render it the greatest Bond experience of all time.



### Octopussy

Yup, it's really so we can play through the opening sequence. Dodging a missile by flying sideways through closing hangar doors sounds like a good bit of fun. And don't forget the exciting auction mini game.



### License to Kill

This movie has everything for a game: sixteen-wheelers racing down a mountain road, skydiving chases and throwing people into containers full of maggots as a finishing move.



### Goldfinger/Moonraker

The one has a big laser, a thug with a lethal hat and the best one-liner ever in a Bond film. The other has Jaws and is in space. Maybe put both Moore and Connery in and make it a co-op game.



## PS3 DEV KIT: 50% OFF!

SONY CUTS COSTS ON PS3 GAME DEVELOPMENT

**I**N A RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT, Sony halved the cost of their PlayStation 3 development kit in a bid to keep the PS3 an appealing choice for developers, or to "contribute to cost-saving measures of the development community" as it were. The dev kit has been reduced to \$10,250 in North America, ¥950,00 in Japan and €7,500 in Europe. The Debug PS3 units have been updated to support programming, upgrading their sole use as a Quality Assurance machine towards a more development-orientated system. Various programming tools have also been integrated into the software development kit.

"As more and more new titles are being developed for the PS3, SCEI will significantly reduce the price of the Reference Tool in order to contribute to the cost saving measures of the development community," said Sony.



"Along with this boost to the PS3 game development environment, SCEI will further reinforce its support system to the development community, and continue to further expand the PS3 platform."

In October, Sony recorded a ¥96.7 billion loss in the game division that was offset by a quarterly profit from strong electronics sales.

## NPD SAYS NO MORE NUMBERS FOR YOU; THEN RECONSIDERS

The NPD Group that supplies sales figures of hardware sales data (specifically with regards to consoles) decided to cut back on the data they normally openly share with the non-paying public. It would still provide the figures to subscribers and noted that, when it first began to supply hardware figures in November 2006, the arrangement was intended to be temporary.

However, the NPD Group reconsidered the decision and according to a GameSpot article, has received approval from Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo to continue providing hardware sales figures as a part of its monthly industry sales update.

"In retrospect, I guess I took certain things for granted and was surprised at the response," said the NPD's David Riley. NPD now plans to make hardware sales figures a permanent part of its regularly updated data.

**SNIPPETS**

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

Mark Rein said that the PC content in *Gears of War* might one day appear for the 360, but there are no plans for it. As he put it, "Never say never."



Both the *PlayStation 3* and *Wii* celebrated their first birthdays in November. Yup, it's been one year already. **Shigeru Miyamoto** also aged in the same month, turning 55.



Want a new theme for your PS3? Head over to [www.ps3-themes.com](http://www.ps3-themes.com) on a PC or the console.



**Ken Kutaragi**, the "father of the PlayStation", has received the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences 2008 Lifetime Achievement Award. He is being honoured for "revolutionising the global in-home entertainment market with the creation and monstrous success of the PlayStation."

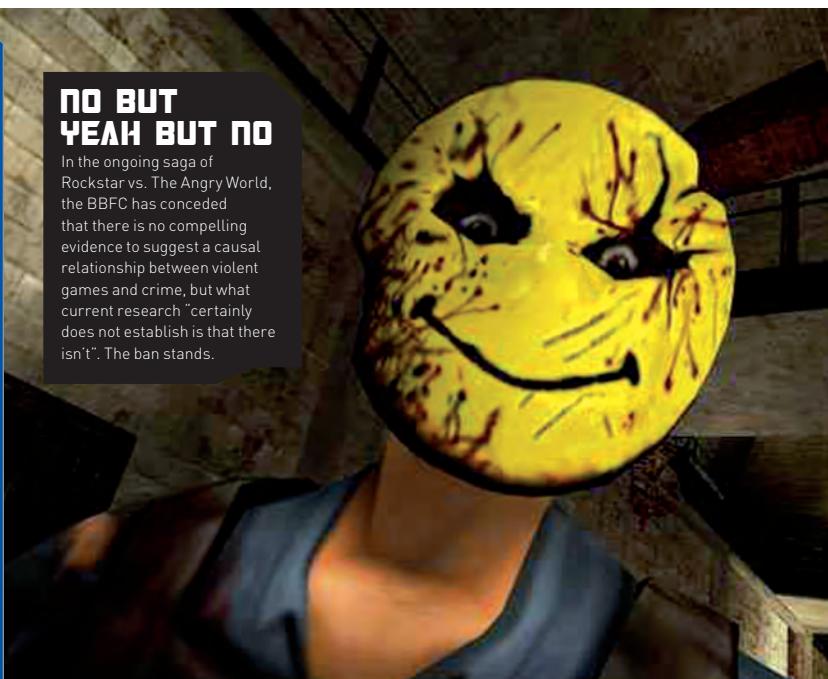


Thanks to a shift in focus by the developer, the *Star Trek MMO* has taken a turn for the more casual. One change touted is that instead of a subscription model, play will be free and money will be made from selling items for the game.

Check out this **PlayStation Controller chain**. It's made from solid white gold and has over 68 carats of black diamonds in it. No, it can't rumble, but someone might rumble you to steal it.

**NO BUT YEAH BUT NO**

In the ongoing saga of Rockstar vs. The Angry World, the BBFC has conceded that there is no compelling evidence to suggest a causal relationship between violent games and crime, but what current research "certainly does not establish is that there isn't". The ban stands.

**KIDS PLAY THE DARNEDEST THINGS**

NAG REPORTS FROM THE BATTLE FRONT

**I**N THE WAKE OF moral panic, Jack Thompson, and the degeneration of today's youth, it's somewhat surprising that nobody seems to be all that bothered about enforcing age restrictions at retail. A recent undercover survey conducted by the National Institute on Media and Family has revealed that underage tots attempting to purchase games rated Mature (17+) succeeded 46% of the time. Not only that, but it emerges that parental supervision of family gaming habits has not increased appreciably either, with 43% of US parents admitting they never play games with their kids. Apparently, public outrage doesn't actually extend beyond vitriolic letters to the local paper.

This startling revelation follows a recent US senator calling for a review of the ESRB's rating process, pending legislation which would enforce ESRB drones to play games to completion before issuing a certification. "In sum, we ask your consideration of whether it is time to review the robustness, reliability and repeatability of your ratings process," wrote the senators in a letter to ESRB president, Patricia Vance.

**GAMERS MAKE GREAT SOLDIERS**

British Army Chief of the General Staff Sir Richard Dannatt recently commended the unflinching efficiency of gamers deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. "There was a time when commentators and some more experienced members of the Army expressed concern as to whether the 'PlayStation generation' were up to dealing with the gritty bloody conflict. Our young soldiers, drawn from across British society, are more than a match for what is required of them and I salute every one of them."

**EA BLUSHES OVER NAUGHTY NFS ADS**

Yes, it's the biggest advertising secret that isn't actually really a secret – sex sells. Especially boobs and blondes. So when you're marketing a game aimed at a predominantly male audience, what better way to lure in the punters than a lavish spread featuring barely-dressed lovelies draped over a Ferrari?

Following the online appearance of a *Need for Speed: ProStreet* promotion that might best be described as "remarkably



irrelevant", however, EA has issued a mortified retraction, claiming it "slipped through the proper EA approval process". How a stack of glossies featuring topless porn stars managed to bypass the QA pipeline without blipping on the radar is beyond the scope of this investigation.

The Website in question is that of popular UK tabloid *The Sun*, renowned for its regular page 3 softcore smut parade. The offending items have since been removed, although one does have to wonder why all the fuss over naughty pictures featured on a Website that only features naughty pictures.

**THEY SAID IT...**

"All you want on that channel is remakes of old, shite arcade games and crap you vaguely remember playing on your Amiga."

Jeff Minter on LIVE Arcade after *Frogger* outsold *Space Giraffe*.

"I would really love to. The only problem is that they would have to be called something else because EA owns the rights, so no plans at the moment."

Peter Molyneux, when asked by Eurogamer if he wanted to revisit some of the Bullfrog games.

"In-game ad expectations are wildly high."

John Riccitiello, EA CEO, on analyst predictions for in-game advertising.

"With a year to go, the game was disastrously off rails. This project was so f\*cked up."

Harvey Smith, *Blacksite: Area 51*'s designer, at the Montreal International Game Summit 2007.

"EA Chicago: Infinity Ward is hiring. [jobs@infinityward.com](mailto:jobs@infinityward.com)"

A message in *Call of Duty*'s lobby from Infinity Ward after EA Chicago was closed.

## THOSE TERRIBLE GAMES

German fans of the retro PC Engine platform got arrested in Tokyo after posting leaflets for the platform on a construction site wall.



Before Pekka-Eric Auvinen posted a video on YouTube and then proceeded to the Jokela High School in Finland where he killed eight people, he played *Battlefield 2*. His favourite game, the killer apparently logged over 180 hours playing it online.



Apparently at a Wal-Mart a 5-year-old kid broke a man's toe after he smashed a *Guitar Hero* controller on the man's foot. The kid was emulating a rock star breaking his own guitar. Wouldn't it be awesome if we all could do that?



A 17-year-old Dutch teenager was arrested and several were questions after they allegedly stole more than \$4,000 worth of virtual furniture from the MMO *Habbo Hotel*. The thieves stole user information through fake sites and nicked the furniture (which was paid for with real-world currency) from the virtual rooms.



A 13-year-old Vietnamese kid was arrested for strangling an old woman and stealing her money so he could play more online games. He buried the 82 year old in front of his house and made off with around \$7.



England's reading skills have apparently fallen from third to fifteenth in the world - and tabloid *The Sun* blames games for this. Clearly it doesn't know all the reading that comes with *Final Fantasy* or *Metal Gear Solid*...



## CARMACK: LOVE HOMEBREW!

ALTHOUGH JOHN CARMACK, CO-FOUNDER of id Software and lead programmer of the team responsible for *Quake*, *Doom* and *Wolfenstein 3D*, has long been a supporter of open source software, it comes as a small surprise that he might support homebrew, which has become synonymous with traditional piracy (while, in all fairness, this is not its only function).

According to Wikipedia, "homebrew is software written for the Nintendo DS handheld games console by hobbyist programmers, as opposed to a software/game production company. Software is typically written using unofficial development kits such as devkitPro."

In a recent interview with IGN on the recently released Nintendo DS title, *Orcs & Elves*, Carmack noted that, "It is a shame that homebrew development can't be officially sanctioned and supported, because it would be a wonderful platform for a modern generation of programmers to be able to get a real feel for low-level design work, to be contrasted with the high-level Web and application work that so many entry-level people start with."



## ACTIVISION: \$199 CONSOLE CRITICAL

AT THE RECENT REUTERS Media Summit in New York, Activision CEO, Bobby Kotick, declared that Sony and Microsoft's consoles should drop to \$199 within the next two years in order to maximise mass marketability and compete with Nintendo's Wii. Well, that's assuming sales figures approaching 700,000 combined per week (nearly one console sold per second) doesn't count as mass marketability. "The Wii at its price point is now setting a standard and an expectation, and people say, well, the Wii is less complex technically. I don't think that really matters as much to the consumer," Kotick said.

The cheapest Xbox 360 currently retails for about \$280, while the PS3 starts out around \$499. According to market analysts, iSuppli Corporation, Microsoft has not only broken even on its production-to-retail costs, but is now beginning to reap a tidy profit of \$75.70 per Premium console sold. Sony, on the other hand, is losing between \$240 and \$306. So no \$199 PS3 anytime soon, then.



JOHN WOO PRESENTS  
**STRANGLEHOLD**





EA has donated the original **SimCity** to the **One Laptop Per Child** project. It's a really nice gesture, but the game in question is nearly 20 years old. Talk about hand-me-downs. How about the rather-nicer **SimCity 2000**, EA?



Lucky enough to have an **iPhone**? Now you can play SCUMM games like *Day of the Tentacle* on it, as **Scumm VM** has been ported to Apple's phone.



As a promotional stunt, Nintendo sent **Buzz Aldrin** and a guy in a **Mario** suit up to float in a Boeing at high altitude. Bracing the upper reaches of the atmosphere, the iconic plumber and the second man on the moon drifted in near-zero gravity.



A **Halo 3** player used the Forge level builder to propose to his girlfriend. He wrote the message by using rifles and she said yes. See? You CAN mix romance and heavy firepower.

The **Atari 2600** has been inducted into the Strong National Museum's toy "Hall of Fame". It is the first 'electronic' toy to achieve this and shares the distinction with toys like the frisbee, LEGO and the hula hoop.



A government-funded boot camp was created in **South Korea** to help people kick online addiction. The camp is designed to remind attendees of 'friendship, routine, the outdoors and hard (physical) work.'



## WAHLBERG FEELS THE PAYNE

**M**ARK WAHLBERG, RECENTLY SEEN in *Shooter* and *The Departed*, has been mentioned as a possible lead for the upcoming *Max Payne* movie. Yes, everyone thinks Max Payne looks like Michael Madsen and that Wahlberg looks nothing like Madsen for Max, but it's early days yet. According to Variety, Twentieth Century Fox has

- The *Wolfenstein* movie has been put on hold until the US writer's strike is over. Script writer Roger Avary says the script is almost done, but the production date and such won't be decided until after the strike.
- The director of the *Prince of Persia* movie, Mike Newell, says that it won't be a videogame movie, but a huge film. Newell previously directed *Four Weddings & A Funeral* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.
- Someone posted a review on Aintitcool.com for Uwe Boll's *Dungeon Siege*. Apparently it's so bad it's not even good in a bad way. To sum it up: "This movie blows. Hard. I mean extremely hard. So hard, that I hope it destroys Uwe Boll's career."

approached the star about the role, but he has yet to agree. Then again, judging from his past roles, Wahlberg should do a good job with the grim-faced cop on a vengeance kick. The film will be directed by John Moore, better known for *Behind Enemy Lines* and the bland *The Omen* remake, and starts production next year

- Rumour has it that Bruce Willis and Billy-Bob Thornton have been approached to play the roles of *Kane & Lynch*. Those are definitely good choices, but can the project attract such big names?



- Film critic Roger Ebert continued his view that games can't be art, using the *Hitman* movie as an example. But despite being panned all-round, *Hitman* managed to get a nice \$20 million in its opening weekend.

## THE EVOLUTION OF: EPIC FAILURES



**Custer's Revenge** (1982): Also known as 'Westward Ho', this pornographic videogame simulated apparent rape of a physically restrained Native American woman. Basically, it was retarded.



**Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon** (1993): Developed by Animation Magic for the Philips CD-i, this "Zelda" really had nothing to do with the series whatsoever and was quite horrible.



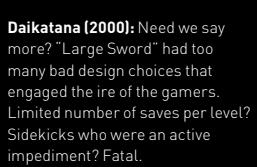
**Bubsy 3D** (1996): Confusing control schemes and camera angles in *Bubsy 3D* doomed the Bubsy series to failure. No Bubsy game was made after this flop.



**Battlecruiser 3000AD** (1996): Seven years in development and it still sucked due to being incomplete and buggy. Developer Derek Smart also had the longest flamewar in history over his game.



**Superman 64** (1999): Atrocious bugs and gameplay issues aside, the game was just totally super-pants. It looked like ass and played like ass.



**Daikatana** (2000): Need we say more? "Large Sword" had too many bad design choices that engaged the ire of the gamers. Limited number of saves per level? Sidekicks who were an active impediment? Fatal.

## FREE GAMES OF THE MONTH



**KONG**  
<http://kongame.co.uk/blog/> [ON THE DVD]

**KONG IS A FUN**, whimsical freeware top-down shooter game with bloodletting monkeys. It's full 3D but constrained to a top-down view. You pick up health/armour packs and weapons, fragging your enemies as you go along. The game has deathmatch, team deathmatch and capture the flag as well as bots for practise. It fully supports LAN play, and should be good for a few rounds in between *DotA* or whatever the kids play these days.



**WARMONGER: OPERATION DOWNTOWN DESTRUCTION**

<http://www.warmongergame.com/media.php> [ON THE DVD]

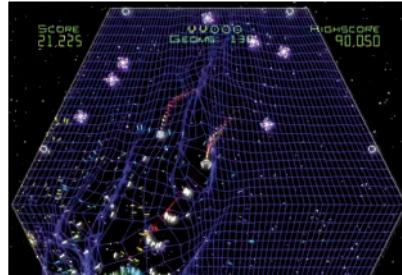
**WARMONGER CREATOR, NETDEVIL, BELIEVES** the next evolution in FPS gameplay will come from physics, and as a result they have released their totally free FPS, *Warmonger*. It contains rigid body technology and procedural destruction of game environments, that "set the stage for dynamic content creation that is truly MMOFPS, totally free, but it requires a PhysX card to run. It allows for online play between teams, but truth be told we don't have a PhysX card so we couldn't really check it out.





## MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Traveler's Tales have eased our fears – **LEGO Batman** will not be based on the latest movie, but instead doing its own thing. Can we assume the same for **LEGO Indy**? • A US comedian recently said in an interview that he recorded dialogue for the new **Leisure Suit Larry** game. After **Magna Cum Lauda**, we hope Sierra remembers it's supposed to be an adventure game. • A new **Terminator** game has been announced to go alongside the new film. • **Two Worlds: The Temptation**. • Is this the next **Tomb Raider**'s name? Eidos has trademarked **Tomb Rader: Underworld**. The studio recently announced **Deus Ex 3**. • **NCSoft** has mused about more 'City of' games to follow **City of Heroes** and **Villains**. This follows it purchasing the franchise from Cryptic and getting some key staff members in the deal as well. • Take Two refuses to settle on a **GTA 4** date, so it might still be a while... • Sony has officially announced **God of War 3**. Again. And, yes, it's coming to the PlayStation 3. • The retro remakes **Sensible Soccer** and **Grifshot** have hit **LIVE Arcade**, ready for your download pleasure. • Red Octane has announced that the stand-alone **Guitar Hero** controllers will become available from January onwards. • Rumour has it that **Oblivion** for the PSP has been cancelled. • Mystery developer Cyan's new game, **Cosmic Osmo's Hex Isle**, is now heading to the PC and 360, if the ESRB site is to be believed. • We dig giant robots! **Supreme Commander**'s 360 version has been dated for early next year. • **Reflexive** is bringing its physics shooter **Axiom Overdrive** to **LIVE Arcade**. We never played it, but it sounds interesting. • A post (or response) on the **BioShock** forums made it very, very clear that there will be no PS3 version of **BioShock**. Apparently they want people to stop asking. • Edward Carnby is going to wave it about as **Alone in the Dark** will now head to the Wii and PS2. That's if we ever see the oft-delayed game. • Wii and DS title **Geometry Wars: Galaxies** has been delayed to early January. • **Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness** is heading to the PSP. We don't know what **Disgaea** is. • **SEGA** has unveiled its answer for **Brain Age: Brain Assist**. This one has nurses in it, guiding you along your way to cerebral superiority. • **Rare** has responded to a recent rumour and confirmed that the new **Banjo-Kazooie**, announced back in 2006, is still in development. • **Everquest II** has gotten two new expansions: **Rise of Kunark** and **Secrets of Faydwer**. You can get the game and all its expansions in one if you buy it from the Sony Online store. • As the sequel is being released on the Wii, **SEGA** announced that the original **NIGHTS into Dreams** is heading to the PS2. • **Haze** and **Splinter Cell: Conviction** have been delayed to 2008. But at least a sequel to **Rainbow Six: Vegas** has been announced. • **The Darkness 2** is rumoured to be in production and might be out by late 2008. • **Dead Rising** is rumoured for PC, especially after Capcom revealed its new development system uses the PC most. • **Runaway: Dream of the Turtle** is DS bound. Adventure point n' click on the DS? Brilliant idea. • Lionhead expects **Fable 2** to only be out by late next year. • **Bomberman Land** is heading to PSP and Wii in January.



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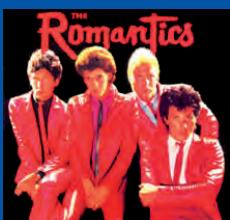
**Assassin's Creed** broke UK records, becoming the fastest-selling new IP on an individual format since 2002. The last was *The Getaway*, which really didn't do that well in the long run.



After **Gamespot** fired **Jeff Gerstmann**, one of its editors, it was rumoured to be about his *Kane & Lynch* review. At the time Gamespot was running a K&L ad campaign on the site. The review itself has also been removed.



Someone on the **Rock Band** forums was served with a pre-eviction notice for making too much noise. See, kids, you need to game with civic responsibility.



A band called **The Romantics** is suing the **Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80s** publishers and developer because the song *What I Like About You* is too similar to their version. Funny, we thought that was the point of a *Guitar Hero* song.

A charity called **Fun for our Troops** has been established. American troops stationed outside the States can register their systems and be sent games donated to the cause.



**Marvel Universe Online** might be cancelled, if rumours are to be believed. Apparently Microsoft plans to can the MMO after key staff departures.

**Tournament.com**, which made waves when it got the exclusive rights for **Counter-Strike** Source tournaments in May, has closed its doors. Guess those were expensive rights.



## PC GAMING IS JUST FINE

SO SAYS ANYONE WITH A VESTED INTEREST IN PC GAMING, ANYWAY

**IF YOU ASK CRYTEK'S** art director, Michael Khaimzon, what he wants for his birthday, you probably won't see an Xbox 360, Wii, or PS3 on the list. "My opinion on them in comparison to the PC is that I think the PC is always better," he told GamesIndustry.biz in a recent interview. "Because the PC you can do so many things with, and the console is just there for the gaming. You cannot create characters on a console – you can't run a 3D program from one, as far as I know." Of course, the fact that the average gamer wants a machine to play games might have passed him by – and this besides the uncomfortable fact that the recommended video card for *Crysis* costs more than any of the aforementioned consoles.

But the PC gaming industry at large isn't overly concerned. Hardcore gamers demand high performance, and "It's absolute nonsense to think that consoles are at the cutting edge," says NVIDIA's Roy Taylor, vice president of content



**Khaimzon**

relations. "As good as consoles are, they are so far behind the PC gaming experience that there is no comparison." While we're not touching that last statement with the proverbial ten-foot pole, there's no denying that PC gaming enjoys an inherent advantage over the console market with its constantly evolving hardware standards. Of course, whether or not gaming is evolving alongside this in any meaningful way is debatable. Just because *Crysis* looks better than anything else doesn't mean it plays better, after all.

## SCHAFER: NO SEQUELS, THANKS

**HAVING PLAYED A MAJOR** role in the creation of legendary games including *Day of the Tentacle*, *Grim Fandango* and, more recently, *Psychonauts*, Tim Schafer has a special place in the hearts of millions of gamers.

Currently working on *Brütal Legend* for the PS3 and Xbox 360, scheduled for release in 2008, Schafer was recently interviewed by Playboy.com about, among other things, his plans for future games. And these plans, apparently, don't include any sequels.

"I would love to go back and spend time with the characters from any game I've worked on, and I would love to make a sequel to any

of them," Schafer told Playboy.com. "But I also want to make something new. If there were five of me I might make sequels, but there's always some new idea I want to explore."

However, Schafer did mention to Joystiq.com that an XBLA game is a definite possibility, just that the team at Double Fine Production is "really busy right now."



## GAMING CHARTS

**Look & Listen**  
DVD • CD • GAMES  
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### PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 08
- 2 SingStar Next Gen
- 3 Assassin's Creed
- 4 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 5 Lair

### XBOX 360

- 1 Assassin's Creed
- 2 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
- 3 Mass Effect
- 4 The Orange Box
- 5 Pro Evolution Soccer 2008

### PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 08
- 2 Crash of the Titans
- 3 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08
- 4 Buzz! The Hollywood Quiz
- 5 The Legend of Spyro: The Eternal Night

### PC

- 1 Crysis
- 2 TimeShift
- 3 Unreal Tournament III
- 4 Empire Earth III
- 5 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

### PSP

- 1 Crash Of The Titans
- 2 Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow
- 3 Ben 10: Protector of Earth
- 4 WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 08
- 5 SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Tactical Strike



October figures provided by GfK  
www.gfsa.co.za

### PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 FIFA 08
- 2 MotorStorm
- 3 Resistance: Fall of Man
- 4 Heavenly Sword
- 5 Pro Evolution Soccer 2008

### XBOX 360

- 1 Halo 3
- 2 FIFA 08
- 3 Project Gotham Racing 4
- 4 Halo 3 Legendary Edition
- 5 BioShock

### PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 FIFA 08
- 2 Rugby 08
- 3 Need For Speed: Underground
- 4 Test Drive: Unlimited
- 5 Gran Turismo 4

### PC

- 1 The Sims 2: Bon Voyage
- 2 Enemy Territory: Quake Wars
- 3 FIFA 08
- 4 Need For Speed: Most Wanted
- 5 Medal Of Honor: Airborne

### PSP

- 1 FIFA 08
- 2 Need For Speed: Carbon
- 3 Tekken: Dark Resurrection
- 4 Killzone: Liberation
- 5 Formula One 2006



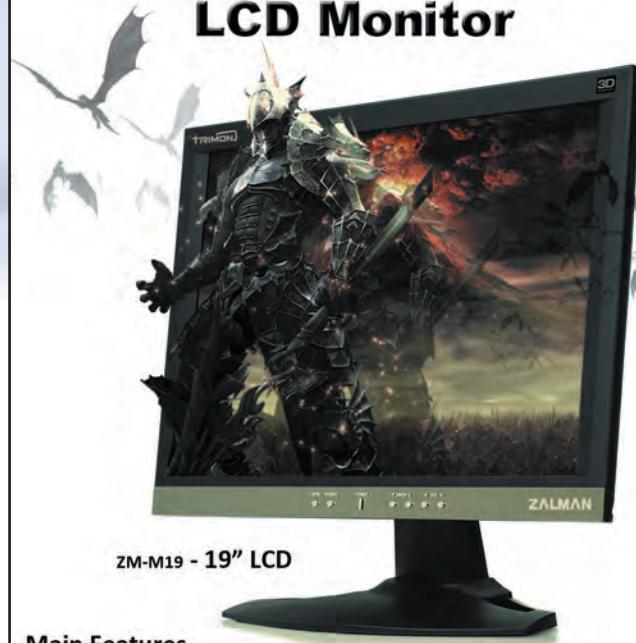
## CONSOLE WATCH

The DS has set a new sales record in the UK for most consoles sold in a week by hitting 191,000 units sold in seven days. • Eidos' chief technology officer, Julien Merceron, believes that **third-party game sales will make or break the Wii** this Christmas. • HD DVD stand-alone player sales have sold an estimated 750,000+ units. • Over the Thanksgiving weekend in North America, the **Nintendo DS** sold over 650,000 units while the Nintendo Wii sold over 350,000 units. • Microsoft and Bungie are **being sued over Halo 3**. Randy Nunez of San Diego alleges that the companies released a faulty product. • Nintendo of America senior vice president, George Harrison, mentions that **Nintendo has no plans to boost its game development in the US**. • Microsoft has updated the **backwards compatibility list for the 360**, raising the number of Xbox games playable on the 360 to over 400. • The newest dashboard update for the 360 **includes proper DivX and MPEG-4 support** as well as the facility to check who's on other people's friends lists. • **Xbox 1 games can now be bought** off the Xbox Originals page on LIVE Marketplace at 1,200 Microsoft Points each. Some are a bit buggy. • Director of Artists and Repertoire at SEGA, Noah Musler, believes **the PS3 will catch up** to, if not surpass, the 360. • Microsoft Game Studios boss Phil Spencer believes that working with the **Nintendo DS** (for *Viva Piñata* DS) will help them **design shorter, casual games for LIVE Arcade**. • Microsoft is celebrating **five years of Xbox LIVE** by handing out some free gifts to subscribers, one of which was *Carcassonne* on 15 November. • At the start of November the **Xbox 360 outsold the PS3 in Japan by a 200 unit margin**. Over 17,000 units were sold that week, compared to the 3,000 in the previous week. • Parental controls are being added to the 360, such as a "Family Timer" that can limit playtime on a "daily or weekly basis", and turns off the console when the limit is reached. • Microsoft believes the **Xbox 360 lifespan may exceed five years**. • Ubisoft president and CEO, Yves Guillemot, believes that the **Xbox 360 and PS3 are very close in terms of what is possible from a development perspective**. Silicon Knights boss Denis Dyack agrees. • Sony has confirmed a **new model PlayStation 2** (with integrated power supply) to enter the market next year and will be available in three colours: black, white and silver. • Nintendo president Satoru Iwata believes that the established "four-year cycle" for games hardware has become too "inflexible an approach". • Sony denies reports of **40% PS3 failure rate**, claiming it to be "totally inaccurate". • PlayStation boss Kaz Hirai says **he's not satisfied with the current version of Home**. • The new **40GB PS3 model uses the 65nm process for the Cell chip** but still the 90nm process for the RSX graphics chip. • *Call of Duty* series developer Infinity Ward says **development of Call of Duty 4 on the PS3 was easy**. • Sony has confirmed that all PlayStation 2 titles that support rumble and are compatible with the PS3 will also rumble on the **new DualShock 3 controller**. • **The PS3 is now one year old** with an estimated 5.6 million units sold.



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## THE NUMBERS

**6 MILLION**

Guitar Hero III units sold worldwide in its first month. (Source: Chart Track)

**\$1.1 BILLION**

Total sales in the US gaming market in October. (Source: NPD)

**\$1 BILLION**

Mexico's projected gaming market value by 2010. (Source: Gamasutra)

**\$210 MILLION**

What Warner Bros. paid for Traveller's Tales (Source: Manchester Evening News)

**1,000**

Number of games in the Gametap.com library. (Source: Gametap)

**9.3 MILLION**

World of Warcraft subscribers. (Source: Blizzard)

**8 MILLION**

The amount of users on Xbox LIVE. (Source: Microsoft)

**1.8 MILLION**

Number of WIs Nintendo manufactures every month. (Source: Nintendo)

**500,000**

Copies US gamers bought of Super Mario Galaxy in its first week. (Source: Nintendo)

**\$149 MILLION**

Codemaster's latest yearly and highest revenue yet, thanks to games like Overlord and DiRT. (Source: Gamasutra)

**\$195 MILLION**

EA's loss for the second quarter of '07. (Source: Associated Press)

**\$1 BILLION**

NVIDIA's revenues for the third quarter of '07. (Source: NVIDIA)

## CALENDAR

## JANUARY RELEASES

Subject to change

Day	Game	Platforms
25	Burnout Paradise	PS3, 360
TBA	Avatar: The Burning Earth	PS2
TBA	BlackSite: Area 51	PS3
TBA	Brian Lara Pleasure Play	PSP
TBA	Bully: Scholarship Edition	Wii
TBA	Cruisin	Wii
TBA	Dark Sector	PS3, 360
TBA	Dragon Blade	Wii
TBA	Ferrari Challenge	Wii, DS, PS3
TBA	Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends	X360
TBA	Frontlines: Fuel of War	PS3
TBA	God of War: Chains of Olympus	PSP
TBA	God of War 2 Platinum	PS2
TBA	Jetix Puzzle Game	DS, PS2
TBA	LocoRoco 2	PSP
TBA	Mega Man ZX Advent	DS
TBA	Mr Bean	DS
TBA	Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	DS
TBA	Thunderbirds	PS2
TBA	Unreal Tournament III	PS3
TBA	Yu Gi Oh - GX Duel Evolution	PSP



## GAMING HISTORY 101 - JANUARY

	<b>9</b> [1998] The cast for the terrible Wing Commander movie is announced.		<b>25</b> [1955] Iwatani Toru, the creator of Pac Man, is born.
<b>2</b> [2003] Michigan passes a law making it illegal to sell mature games to minors.		<b>18</b> 	
			
<b>4</b> [1999] Nintendo announces a rumble cartridge for the Game Boy. [2003] Unreal II goes gold.	<b>12</b> [1999] Intel announced the Pentium III processor.	<b>20</b> [1960] Sims creator Will Wright is born.	<b>28</b> [1998] StarCraft is released in the US.
<b>5</b> [1985] Atari announces the Atari ST.	<b>13</b> [2003] In Hong Kong a man dies after only six hours of Diablo 2. Damn that cow level!	<b>21</b> [1998] Capcom releases Resident Evil 2 on the PlayStation.	<b>29</b> [1996] 3D Realms and Apogee release Duke Nukem 3D.
<b>6</b> [2000] Retailers start taking pre-orders for the PlayStation at \$299 a pop.	<b>14</b> [1987] Nintendo releases Zelda II: The Adventure of Link in Japan.	<b>22</b> [1998] Toys R' Us becomes the last major US retailer to drop Sega Saturn products.	
	<b>15</b> [2003] EA releases SimCity 4.		<b>31</b> [1997] Square releases Final Fantasy VII on the PlayStation. [1999] Konami releases the first Silent Hill.
	<b>16</b> [2002] A Stanford medical report claims that violent games make kids less violent in real life.	<b>24</b> [2002] EA releases the Black & White: Creature Isle expansion.	

## CAPTION OF THE MONTH

Every month we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject [January Caption].

**JANUARY CONTEST**  
**NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:** "Im on ur islandz st33lin ur ballz."



## DECEMBER WINNER

"With no more ammo for his guns and completely outnumbered, he had to resort to his most dangerous and the only weapon he had left in his ARSENAL."

- Jordan Nickel

**vivendi GAMES**

**RULES:** (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) Obey all posted speed limits. (4) Never run with scissors. (5) There is no spoon. (6) Don't tell me what I can't do!



## WE NEED A HERO

Every month, in honour of our favourite TV show, *Heroes*, we'll hide the mysterious mark of the heroes somewhere in the magazine. It could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find it and send an e-mail to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line [Heroes January]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a copy of *LEGO Star Wars II* for 360 from Megarom!



## LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Aart Verrips, p43



**megarom**



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# Q&A: TELLTALE

THE HONEYMOON IS OVER. VALVE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THAT IT MIGHT NOT DO EPISODIC IN THE FUTURE. *SIN* FAILED AFTER ONE ATTEMPT, AND EVERYONE ELSE IS A LOT MORE CAREFUL BEFORE THROWING THE WORD AROUND. THAT'S BECAUSE 'EPISODIC' SOUNDS EASY. OBVIOUSLY IT'S NOT. HOWEVER, IT IS WORTH IT, AS THE FIRST SUCCESS STORY OF EPISODIC GAMING CAN TELL YOU. WITH *SAM & MAX: SEASON 1* UNDER ITS BELT, TELLTALE GETS READY FOR THE STORYLINE IN THE DOSSIERS OF THE FREELANCE POLICE. WE TRIED TO INTERVIEW THE DUO, BUT THEY DON'T TALK TO THE PRESS. THEREFORE, WE CHATTED TO EMILY MORGANTI, TELLTALE'S MARKETING GURU AND COMMUNITY MANAGER, ABOUT BUSINESS.



**How successful has *Sam & Max* been? Did it help create a working model for your episodic games?**

Absolutely. We wouldn't be doing a second season if it weren't successful! We developed other games before *Sam & Max*, but *Season One* was the first episodic series to follow the type of schedule our founders envisioned when they started the company. So, from that perspective it was a huge milestone. The success of *Season One* also made jumping into *Season Two* a lot easier. We already knew what worked; now we just had to tweak the parts that hadn't worked as well so we could do an even better job this time around.

**Will Telltale be returning to *Bone* soon?**

We have some ideas for the next *Bone* game and there's been talk behind the scenes, but the game is not in production at the moment.

**What convinced Steve Purcell to re-release the *Sam & Max* graphic novel? How involved is he with the games?**

This August was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first *Sam & Max* comic book, which made it a great time to bring back the collection. *Surfin' the Highway* has been out of print for over ten years and it's become very hard to find (and expensive if you do manage to find it!). Steve wants people to read the comics, and bringing the book back was the best way to make that happen. Also, it's a great piece of cross promotion: it's going to help people who don't know about the games to find out about them, and it's going to introduce people who already know about the games to the original comics. The *Sam & Max* universe keeps getting bigger...

As for Steve's involvement in the games, it's pretty much the same as last season. He was mostly involved at the beginning of the process when the team was mapping out the story and coming up with new characters. Sam and Max's private eye neighbour, Flint Paper, is from the comics, so of course Steve came up with the character design for Flint, and he also designed Stinky and Santa Claus and some of the other characters you'll see later on in the season. From a story perspective, the designers brainstorm with him and Steve always seems to come up with a twist that makes the story just a little weird.

**Is there anything else you are eying at the moment for a new game series? Perhaps another comic IP?**

Yes! However, nothing I can talk about today. Something I hope people have learned about Telltale by now is that we always have more going on in the studio than we're talking about publicly. Let the speculation begin...

**The casual gaming market has seen a lot of activity recently with big publishers moving in. Do you consider your main market a casual one, and do you consider all the extra attention a good or bad thing?**

Our market is anyone who wants to spend a few hours with an entertaining, interactive story. That might be the die-hard adventure game fan who's been playing these games since the 1990s, and it might be my mother-in-law. We don't discriminate.

With *Sam & Max*, we're trying to appeal to both of these markets. One of the new features in *Season Two* is a hint system that has Max giving you clues based on how frequently you get stuck. The casual gamer who just wants a relaxing gaming experience and doesn't want to be stuck can turn it all the way up, and adventure game fans who want a harder experience can turn it off - or you can set it somewhere in the middle. We hope game-play elements like this will make our games appeal to the gaming audience and the casual audience.

**The next big release from Telltale will be the complete *Sam & Max Season 1*. What kind of bonus content is included? Will people who bought the series online be able to access that content as well?**

We came out with two versions of *Season One* on disc. The games are the same, but the bonuses are different. The retail version was published by The Adventure Company in North America and JoWooD in Europe. The bonus features in this version include an exclusive behind-the-scenes video shot at our office and a full-sized poster of Steve Purcell's art that comes folded up inside the box. Telltale also released a DVD for our *Season One* customers... Think of it as the "fan club" release. The cover is a new painting by Steve and the DVD has bonus video content, including commentary from the development team, Machinima shorts, a blooper reel... basically the same stuff you'd find on a DVD release of a TV show. Anyone who bought the downloadable season from us can get this DVD for just the cost of shipping. A lot of the content from Telltale's DVD is available at [www.telltalegames.com/summerofsamandmax](http://www.telltalegames.com/summerofsamandmax), so people who didn't buy the season from us can still check it out.

**What were some of the biggest lessons learned from the first season?**

That players like to have new jokes each episode, even if you're clicking on an item in the office that you've been able to click on from the beginning. It may sound like a small thing, but that was a surprise for us. Simply changing the billboard on the street and the posters on the alley wall can make a big difference to someone who's playing an episode a month.

Another surprise was players' buying habits. We thought people might pick and choose the episodes that appealed to them the most,



but in the end, it turned out that most people who played an episode went on to buy the full season (or just bought the full season from the start). That changed how the designers approached the story in *Season Two*. It became more important for the last episode to have a really satisfying climax that tied together a lot of loose ends from previous episodes.

**Who does the writing for the games?**

The *Sam & Max* games are written by contract and in-house writers. The designers plan what needs to happen in each scene and then hand off the script to writers, who come up with all of the dialogue to fill the scenes. This season, a lot of the writing is being done by Chuck Jordan of *Curse of Monkey Island* fame. He was a contact writer last season and did most of the dialogue for *Abe Lincoln Must Die*. He's really, really good, so we hired him full time.

At the beginning of *Season One*, we would send scripts to Steve and he would take a pass at them before voice recording started. Once the games started coming out once a month, the schedules became more compressed and we didn't have time to keep doing that. I don't think Steve is seeing the scripts for *Season Two*, but we've done this once already so there's a level of trust there now. Steve's comfortable with what our writers are doing, so it's not as important for him to see every script.

**Sam and Max are obviously travelling a lot more. Can you give us a few clues about where they might end up in *Season Two*?**

*Episode Two* is set on Easter Island, and *Episode 3* in Europe. Beyond that, I can't say... In addition to travelling to various places, each of the places they go to has a sort of mythic quality to it. That's one of the common themes that will connect the episodes this time.



**Purcell is currently at Pixar. Firstly, aren't you paying him enough royalties, and secondly, does that mean we'll get a *Sam & Max* movie?**

Good question! I'm sure the royalties from our games are enough that Steve could retire and move his whole family to Fiji if he wanted to, but if you were an artist and animator by trade, would you really give up a job at Pixar? I have no idea about plans for a *Sam & Max* movie, but if there were to be one, I hope Telltale could be involved.

**Telltale has positioned itself in a unique position with its episodic successes. It's also a skilled license game developer, thanks to *CSI*. On paper, at least, episodic and television license games look like a nice match. Has the idea to combine them ever come up?**

We actually think of *CSI* as an episodic license. It's released at retail in a box, but it's really a collection of self-contained cases, just like one of our *Sam & Max* seasons. There are definitely other TV licenses this model could work for and it's something I'm sure you'll see from us in the future.

**Thank you! Anything you'd like to add?**

Play *Season Two*! The season premiere, *Ice Station Santa*, launches on 9 November on [www.telltalegames.com](http://www.telltalegames.com), with the second episode coming in January. In addition, we're releasing *Abe Lincoln Must Die* - one of the best episodes from last season - for free. We're hoping this will act like a really long demo and convince people who haven't tried the *Sam & Max* games yet to check them out. So, if you're still on the fence, go to our Website (or any number of other sites on the Internet that will be hosting it) and check it out. Hey, it's free! **NAG**



## MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar "Mahou Shoujo Minotaurus Rex" Dracon

# EVERYBODY'S FREE (TO LOVE WHAT THEY DO)

(WITH APOLOGIES TO MR VONNEGUT)

**S**TRETCH. BAZ LURHMAN TRIED to teach me that. Along with a host of other important life tips. Advice, like youth, probably just wasted on the young. Ten years after Baz my editor managed to convince me that stretching is something I should make time for. That simple task took several years of applied indifferent pathos and a double-dose of Kurt Vonnegut (a time-travelling author who may have been an alien). The change managed remove several mental metaphorical maladies at once and a few innocent bystanders as well. In short: I'm as stubborn as an ox. I don't mind.

Stubborn people tend to try and stick with what works. We lack the reflection to notice that what works changes over time. I was sitting in the car on the way to the office thinking. My significant other drives, which leaves my mind free to explore. This is a normal start to my day. My mind reports back on what it finds out there. Sometimes. If it feels like it. On this particular morning, I remained buoyantly bolstered by recent positive things in my life. My brain was especially diligent in keeping me in the loop. I realised something painfully obvious in this manner. Something previously obfuscated by my stubbornness. I don't mind. I was thinking about downloading *Every Extend Extra Extreme* a.k.a. *E4* from Xbox LIVE Arcade because I was excited to play it. Realisation hit me like a gender-confused hurricane.

Boy, gaming sure has grown up fast. It's just too big now! When I first got into gaming, it was small enough to consume whole. Sure, the games were expensive and the new systems cost money. I'm the industrious type and not below selling off my junk at inflated prices to people who are willing to pay such prices. I am not a crook.

Times change and gaming is a big-boy industry now with big-boy culture surrounding it. Adolescent still, but growing fast now. I don't mind.

But it's too big to consume whole. There are too many games to try. Too many developers to follow. So many great ideas not finding their voice in the oceanic torrent of populist games trying to placate the masses and lighten their wallets. I don't mind now. I have *E4*, it's busy downloading in the meeting room. The meeting room doubles as NAG's gaming room at the moment.

*E4* represents exactly the type of game that has always fascinated me. A hybrid, the game combines dodging and exploding and synesthetic interactions with music. It has the godly touch of Tetsuya Mizuguchi (*Rez*, *Space Channel 5*, *Lumines*) guiding its divine mission. It's a game that uses rhythm as the foundation for all its mechanics

and such games are rare. The more obvious ones are popular, and karaoke doesn't count. *Guitar Hero* has certainly brought the genre to the masses. I don't mind. A rock star is a rock star, even if it's just in your own head.

It's hard to maintain pure unadulterated interest in what you love when what you love grows beyond your capacity to enjoy it as fully as it deserves. The bigger gaming gets, the more difficult it becomes for me to find something that really engages me. Something that challenges me but doesn't try to pander to my comfort zones. To quote Mick Jagger, "I can't get no satisfaction". So, like Jagger, I experiment with dangerous stuff. I don't mind. I sample Japanese danmaku shmups, yoko or tate, I don't care. Whatever gets me off. I'm not above doujinshi, but I blame Bowser for that. Nintendo single-handedly created an entire generation of the sexually confused by kitting a butch turtle up in leather fetish gear. I don't mind. Hard not to respect a company like that. And let's not even start on Link. Effeminate elf-boy that in the latest game turns into a wolf with an earring? Internet Rule 34: If you can imagine it, there is porn of it. I don't mind.

Working in an environment that requires, I believe, a certain amount of implicit participation to keep on top of all this gaming stuff may hamper enjoyment of said stuff. Knowing is half the battle; the other half is easily avoided using politics and bribes. Beyond that, when all else fails, stretch.

Or play *Team Fortress 2*. **NAG**



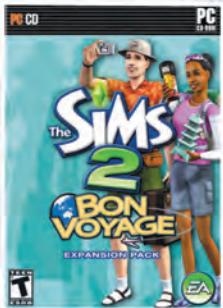
## RECOMMENDED READING

*Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut  
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*Accelerando* by Charles Stross

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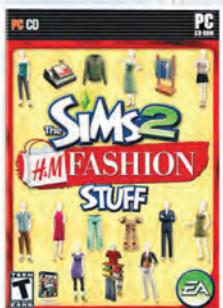
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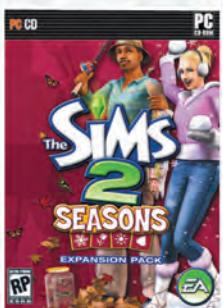
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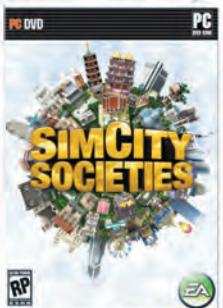
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## DAMMIT!

by Megan Hughes

# GO GREEN

**G**LOBAL WARMING ISN'T NEWS anymore. It's a topic that has been so abused by the media that it seems as familiar as a Hollywood movie plot. The bad guys wear dark clothes and hide in their mansions, probably stroking huge, mean-looking Persian cats, while the rest of the world casually continues with the monotony of their lives, waiting for the hero to appear.

But the really good movies, the ones we go out and buy the DVD of so that we can show all our friends and watch it again and again, always have some interesting plot twists, usually involving a character blurring the presumed lines between good and evil.

In a small way, that might prove to be significant in the future, and that is exactly what has happened. BP, an energy company involved in oil refining and power production, has teamed up with Tilted Mill Entertainment to create awareness of the implications of pollution, including smog and ill health. *SimCity Societies* easily emulates the natural disasters also associated with global warming, such as droughts and heat waves, and to reduce the effects in the game one must, of course, invest in the more expensive options of BP-labelled solar and wind farms.

This, along with the news that Eskom's load shedding plan will be affecting the country for another five to seven years, inspired me to trawl the Internet in search of tips on reducing my carbon footprint. The average South African's is about 13 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> (according to the BP Website). Because I'm such a kind and charitable person, I have created a list of the things that we, as gamers, can do to ensure that there is still a planet to game on and electricity to game with in the near future.

1. Unplug. According to the International Energy Agency, "15% of household electricity consumption worldwide is wasted in standby mode." So, after switching off, remember to unplug.
2. Use the Internet. Stop reading newspapers. They are made from

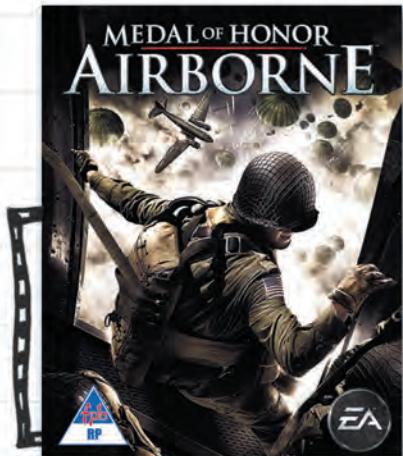
trees. Rather look up the news on the Internet. Moreover, while you're there, you can always visit Blackle.com – the energy-efficient version of Google.

3. Turn off the lights. If you're not using them, they don't need to be on. If you forget, Eskom offers this service free of charge.
4. Save water. Gamers don't need to bathe. Right? Especially if we're just spending the weekend absorbing the glow from LCD screens. Nevertheless, you might consider showering before returning to work/school as it apparently uses a third of the water used for a bath.
5. Eat less meat. The methane gas that cows produce as a by-product of digestion is contributing significantly to global warming.
6. Walk. It's a great alternative to using a car. A bicycle could be used for longer distances, but, better still, you could just stay home. Who needs to visit friends when you have ←insert favourite game title→ at home?
7. Sunbeams. What better way to charge your cellphone, MP3 player or PDA than harnessing the energy of the sun? Ndlovu Tech has a range of products that do just that and may come in handy during Eskom's load shedding.
8. Standby. Although standby mode consumes electricity, if you'll be away from your PC for some time and shutting down would be a waste of time (and energy), rather switch your computer to standby mode to reduce energy consumption.
9. Buy Proudly South African. Support local game developers. NAG is also proudly South African, so you can tell your friends that you're actually saving the planet by buying the magazine.
10. Plant a tree. Go on, you know you want to. Dumping a tree on a *Far Cry* map or *Sims* landscape doesn't count. Find a real shovel, plant a real tree. **NAG**





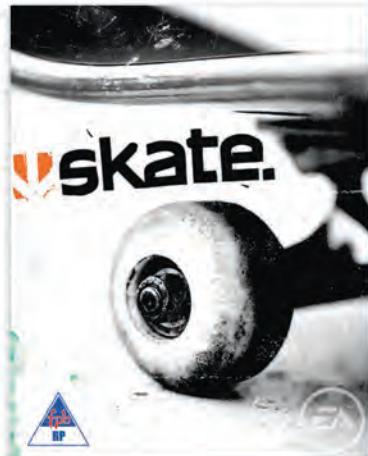
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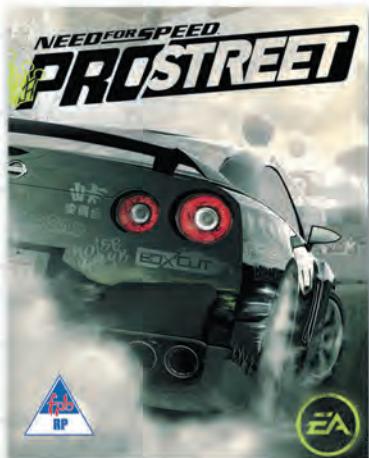
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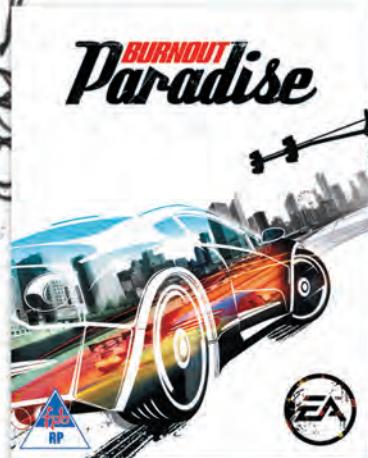


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## RAMJET

by Walt Pretorius

# DELAYED SNAKE OIL...

**T**HE FESTIVE SEASON DIDN'T really quite pan out the way we thought it would. Sure, most of the games we were expecting arrived on time – we played *Assassin's Creed*, *Jericho*, *ProStreet* and *Crysis*. It was a good gaming time, interspersed with overly large meals and family gatherings.

However, as always, there were those titles that didn't make it to the shelves on time. Some of them we can wait for, but others being delayed is annoying.

It seems, though, that gamers never learn. We listen to all the hype, wait with baited breath for the 'Best Game Ever' to be released, and then grumble when it is delayed. Moreover, we grumble some more when it isn't actually the 'Best Game Ever', but rather 'More of The Same Crap'. We vocalise our feelings of betrayal and deception as loudly as we can, proclaiming to the world that the 'Big Bad Gaming Corporation' screwed us out of another three hundred bucks (or more if consoles are your thing).

Although I'm not certain, I think that this might cause some kind of heart disease. Stress, after all, is not really a very good thing, and the added weight of stress caused by delays and non-delivery of promises is probably worse.

This leads to something that people sometimes talk about, although in rather amused terms: the health risks of gaming. We've all heard about Nintendo Thumb and carpal tunnel syndrome. We've

all heard about the guy in the Far East who died from playing games for 48 hours straight. We've probably all seen the episode of *Boston Legal* that dealt with a similar topic. We've heard about the mental 'problems' that gaming may or may not result in. (Although judging by some of the gamers I have met, I'm inclined to agree that games do have an effect on folks. The only thing that stops most gamers from becoming psycho killers is that they are not exactly physical types.)

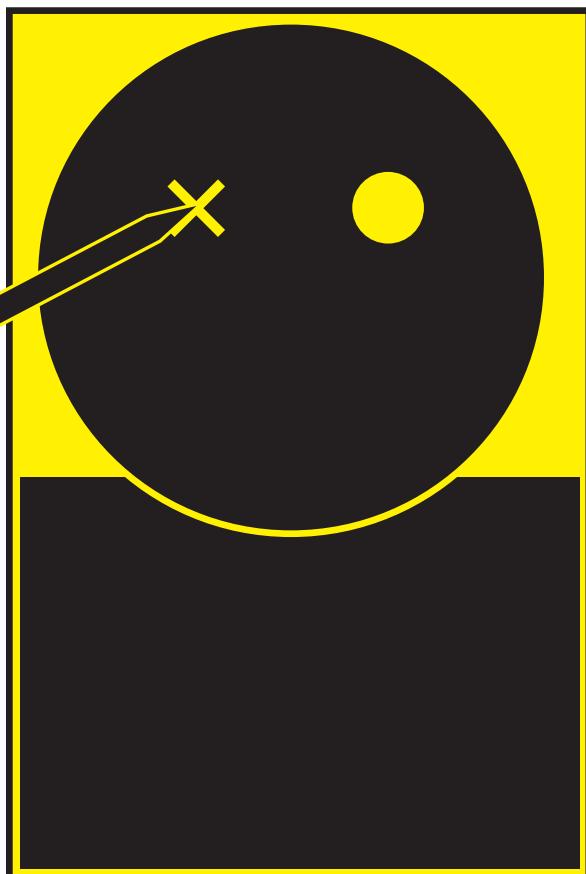
However, what of the mental anguish that gaming and the gaming industry causes gamers? We might not realise it, but constant disappointment is not good for the psyche, and the industry delivers more quality disappointment than quality games these days. One look at Miktar confirms this: if the guy were any more jaded, he'd be a Chinese artefact.

In showing concern for my fellow gamers (whom I don't give a toss about, but I had to write a column about something this month), I have decided to prepare a new gaming health guide. It doesn't deal with physical problems (the Internet is full of advise for that kind of stuff) and it doesn't deal with psychosis (most of you reading this are irreversibly insane anyway). Rather, it's advice on how not to suffer from the depression induced by the gaming industry.

First off (and I have said this before), stop listening to the hype. Magazines like this one cannot really be blamed, because we just respond to what the industry tells us. Read the articles and previews, but take what you read with a pinch of salt. Become 'hype-proof'. Read between the lines. Think a little.

Secondly, learn to expect a game when you see it on shelf. It irritates the hell out of me when someone bitches about a delayed release for the eighth time. That means they have suffered the same disappointment seven times before. If, by way of analogy, you poke yourself in the eye seven times with a sharp HB pencil and you haven't learned to either stop it or close your eye by the eighth time, you are (a) beyond hope and (b) beyond stupid. Expecting games to be released when the industry tells us they will be is equally short sighted and naive... oh, actually that was almost funny. Pencil in the eye? Short sighted? Ah, forget it...

What you need to realise is that the industry cares even less about you than I do. Don't for one second believe that the gaming industry is interested in anything other than parting you from your money. If you are going to be gullible and naive, you deserve it. Stop buying into the hype, stop believing hollow promises and start investigating games (by playing them in-store or playing demos) before you buy them. You will be a happier, healthier and, most likely, wealthier person because of it. Not that I care. **NAG**





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## KINGPIN

by Michael James

# ONE STEP CLOSER: A STORY ABOUT MY FIRST SCREW...

**B**ESESIDES PLAYING GAMES, MOST serious gamers also enjoy reading books and watching movies about fantasy and science fiction; daydreaming about developing games; and collecting figurines. We tend to spend more time in fantastical worlds created by moviemakers, authors and game developers than most civilians. Additionally, as a gamer, one is exposed to many situations, including (but not limited to) clubbing and shooting your way through zombie-infested shopping malls or defeating alien invaders intent on converting humanity to edible slush. Gamers know what I mean, so the aforementioned is important to keep in mind if you're not a gamer (so you'll understand what's coming next and won't label me a loon).

Thanks to my own stupidity, deadlines and fear (did I mention deadlines), I ended up hearing the most feared word one can hear while sitting in a dentist's chair: extraction. What! Me? It hasn't been that long since I was here... you can't be right! I thought that tooth was more or less okay... I want my mommy! Anyway, the story goes like this: A filling fell out while I was eating popcorn. I obviously left it far too long – the decay had progressed to just below the gum line and it had to come out. It was a surprisingly painless experience considering that I was expecting screaming, a little blood and at some stage a sweaty dentist... You see, most of my knowledge about dentistry has been gained from books and movie theatres.

People who know me will understand that having a gap in my teeth (even if it's too far back to see) is a serious issue. I used to think missing teeth went hand-in-hand with banjo-playing hicks, trailer parks and people who grow grass and collect broken cars. I'd heard about implants

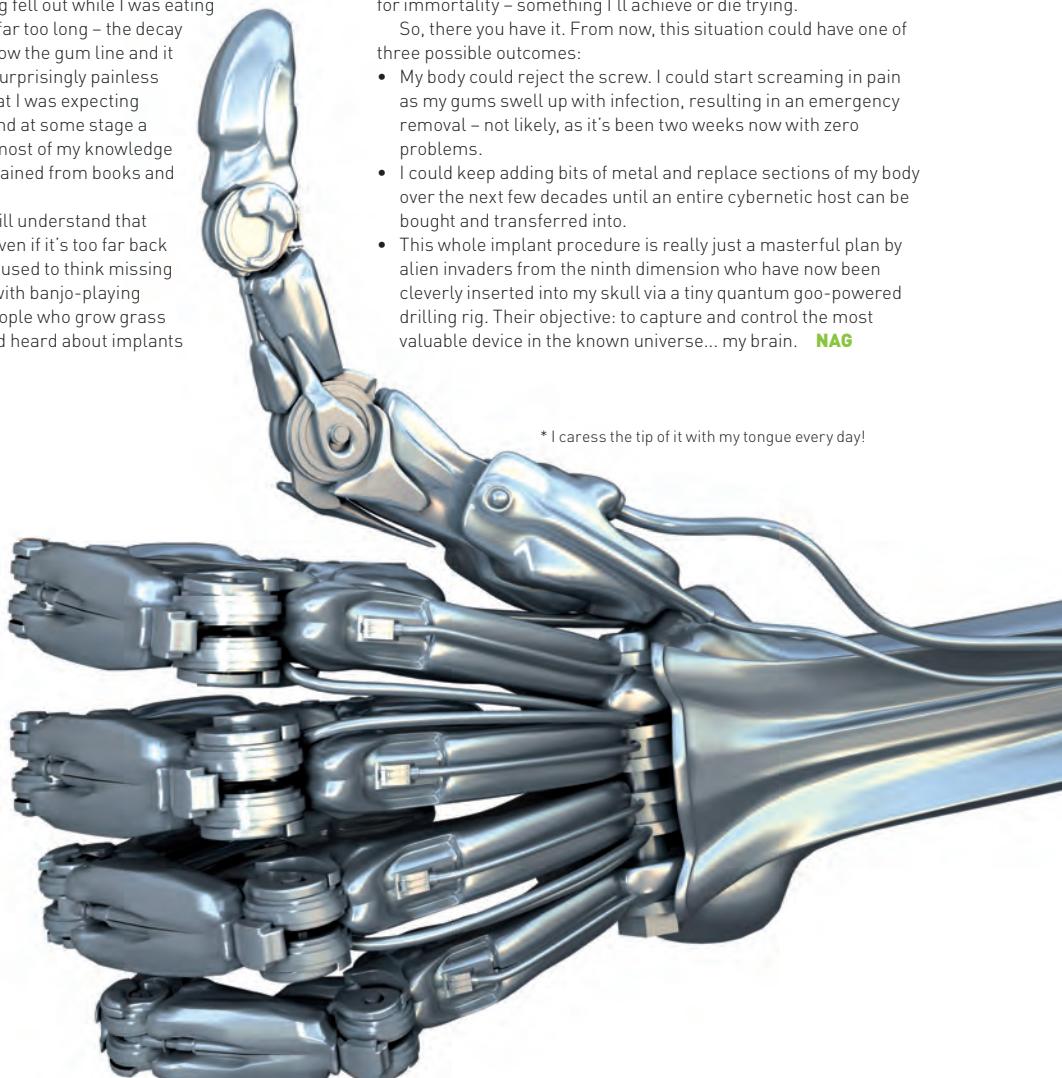
and immediately signed up for the treatment. After all, I'm no hick. The process was simple: two injections, slicing the gum to bare the bone, drilling and the final insertion of the screw. Now (two weeks later) all that remains is for the 'site' to heal, and in three months, when the bone and the 13mm titanium screw (I desperately want to say 13 inches of cold hard steel here) become one, it'll be time for the fitting of a 100% fake but real-looking, indestructible tooth. Hooray, and yes, I really love the idea of metal in my skull. \*

At this point you must be wondering what the [insert bad word] this has to do with gaming. Well, the introduction at the top was a scene setter and now for the punch line. I'm happy because I've received my first instalment (a titanium screw) and am now one step closer to becoming an android. I think that next I'm going to replace a portion of my skull with a metal plate or perhaps even go for an unnecessary tooth extraction (on the other side – for matching pairs). No, this isn't some twisted version of body dysmorphic disorder but more of a quest for immortality – something I'll achieve or die trying.

So, there you have it. From now, this situation could have one of three possible outcomes:

- My body could reject the screw. I could start screaming in pain as my gums swell up with infection, resulting in an emergency removal – not likely, as it's been two weeks now with zero problems.
- I could keep adding bits of metal and replace sections of my body over the next few decades until an entire cybernetic host can be bought and transferred into.
- This whole implant procedure is really just a masterful plan by alien invaders from the ninth dimension who have now been cleverly inserted into my skull via a tiny quantum goo-powered drilling rig. Their objective: to capture and control the most valuable device in the known universe... my brain. **NAG**

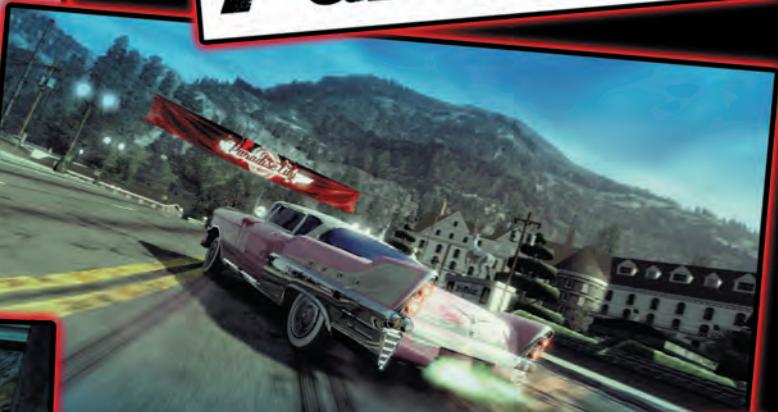
\* I caress the tip of it with my tongue every day!



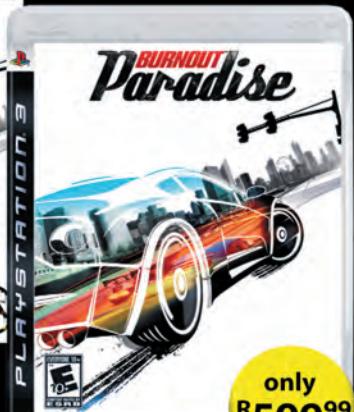
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IT'S ABOUT TIME TO GET OUT YOUR ROAD RULES HANDBOOK AND SEE HOW MANY RULES YOU CAN BREAK - PREFERABLY AT THE SAME TIME. IF ESCAPISM EVER HAD A HOME, IT HAD TO BE THE WORLD OF *BURNOUT*. YOUR CHANCES OF SURVIVING A TERRIBLE WAR IN THE MIDDLE OF SPACE WITH NO OXYGEN TANK MUST BE SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN HITTING ONCOMING TRAFFIC AT OVER 300KM/H. THEREFORE, IT'S BEST TO LEAVE SUCH ACTIVITIES FOR THE VIRTUAL WORLD. MANY OF US KNOW THIS, WHICH IS WHY CRITERION'S SERIES OF CRASH-RACING TITLES HAS BEEN AS HOT AS THE BURNER TRAILS THEIR CARS LEAVE. *BURNOUT PARADISE* IS A COMING OF AGE FOR THE SERIES. BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP, IT REPRESENTS ALL THAT IS GOOD ABOUT THE SERIES ALONG WITH A FEW NEW, AWESOME IDEAS. WE CHATTED TO NICK CHANNON, *BURNOUT PARADISE*'S SENIOR PRODUCER, ABOUT CRUNCHING METAL, INSANE SPEEDS AND EXPLODING IN A BUSY INTERSECTION.

**When we chatted to you guys around a year ago, you considered yourself PlayStation specialists. Is this still the case?**

We have kept our development focused on the PS3. At Criterion, we have always championed the Sony platforms, and we think the PS3 is an amazing machine. However, the Xbox 360 is also a great machine and *Burnout Paradise* is an amazing game on both platforms.

**A lot has been said about *Burnout Paradise* having been developed from scratch. Obviously, a new engine like this is a big investment, so more *Burnout* games are a given. However, are there plans to use the technologies for new Criterion games and other EA projects?**

We developed *Burnout Paradise* from scratch because we wanted to create a truly next-gen game. Throwing everything away was the only way to achieve this. It's been tough, but the team has done an amazing job, and we are incredibly proud of the game we have created. We believe it changes gaming conventions. It's unique and we believe it's truly next-gen. As

for the future, obviously we have a great base. However, as we always have done at Criterion, we'll continue to push the technology as hard as we can with every game we deliver.

**One thing *Black* pushed was the sound capabilities of the PlayStation 2. With the extra power of the next-gen machines, how big a leap has sound taken?**

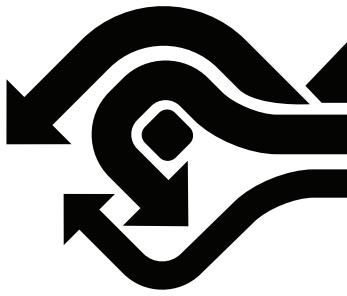
As with every Criterion game, we have spent lots of time perfecting the audio. We're really pleased with how it's turned out in *Burnout Paradise*; really enhancing the sensation of speed and highlighting the cars' crunching crashes.

**The crashes look spectacular! What kind of research went into the crash scenes?**

Crashes have been a major part of all the *Burnout* games, so we've gained a lot of experience over the years in how to make them look great. We've basically just drawn on this experience and with the additional power of the consoles, we are able to have lots of debris and extra effects that make the crashes look so good.

### MAKE THAT ENGINE PURR

*Burnout Paradise* marks the beginning of a new era after *Burnout Dominator* (the last title in the series to use RenderWare). With that, a piece of gaming history will be etched in stone. RenderWare was created before Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) started to appear on the market, and competed as a software-rendering package. It evolved over the years, introducing changes and improvements, and progressed with the advent of hardware-rendered 3D graphics. The middleware found its niche with the PlayStation 2, and it became a very affordable and easy way to develop games for the tricky Sony console. Ultimately, RenderWare helped power some of that gaming period's biggest titles, including *Grand Theft Auto*, *Burnout 3*, *Tony Hawk's Underground*, *The Movies*, *Max Payne 2* and *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*. *Paradise* still uses RenderWare, but according to Criterion, it is still a new engine. That technically makes the last true RenderWare game to be released *Crackdown*. Unfortunately, after EA's purchase of Criterion, third-party developers and publishers showed less interest in RenderWare. The engine's was also neglected after EA mismanaged its development, allowing Epic's Unreal Engine 3 to take the throne as the industry's preferred rendering tool. During its lifespan though, RenderWare powered over 75 games.



Judging from the videos, there seems to be more control over cars while they are in the air. Is this so?

You have some control over the car when you barrel roll, but this is more to help you land the jumps.

**This might sound like a small thing, but the last Burnout title didn't allow you to rear-end traffic without crashing. Will this return in Paradise?**

As with all the *Burnout* games, we've created a realistic traffic system throughout the game world. How you 'interact' with it depends a lot on the car you are driving. Lighter cars will be taken out when they hit the traffic, but the big cars rule the road, though they're clearly not as fast or well suited to doing stunts as the lighter ones. Choosing the right car is one of the keys to success in the game. Certain cars perform better in specific events, and getting a good variety in your junkyard will help you succeed.

**Are there any new game modes? Which of the staple modes return and which have been removed?**

We have five different types of events that can start at traffic lights and we have two road rules per road. We also have loads of free-form gameplay, which doesn't fall into modes per se. In terms of events, we have Races, Road Rages, Stunt Run, Marked Man, and Burning Route challenges. Stunt Run is a brand-new game mode, which uses your knowledge of the world to go find and chain jump and smash across the world. You improve your score by how stylishly you can do it. Barrel rolls, flat spins as well as huge jumps and smashing billboards are the keys to success. Marked Man is also a brand-new game mode where the player has to get from A to B without being taken out too many times. It's a game of cat and mouse and you are the mouse. Now you will know what it feels like when someone else has road rage!

**Apparently, you can take a car from your junkyard to be fixed. Will there be any options to personalise a car with mods or skins?**

No. *Burnout* is not about modifying cars. We do allow you to choose colours, and there are a few liveries to choose from for each car.

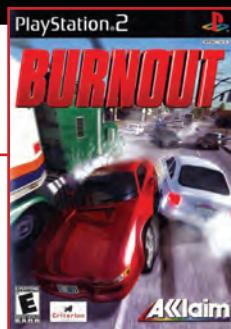
**Third-party PlayStation 3 games, even from EA, have been hit-or-miss affairs compared to other versions of the same games. How will you assure PS3 owners that they won't be short-changed with Paradise?**

We knew early on that we wanted this game to be radically new and innovative, so we started by looking at open-world games and what conventions we wanted to break. We saw a racing genre obsessed with laps, checkpoint markers, chevrons and most importantly, with a very linear progression structure. We also saw a genre where online

## BURNING LEGEND

### BURNOUT [2001]

The first *Burnout* was a pure racing game. Players progressed through the ranks by competing in and winning various events, with each event featuring faster cars. There were also Time Trial, Single race, and multiplayer modes. It was originally published by the now-defunct Acclaim.



### BURNOUT 2: POINT OF IMPACT [2002]

With the first sequel came the much-loved and iconic feature where you could and should bring the other cars to crash and explode, hence the name *Point of Impact*. It also refined how and when players got precious boost for higher speeds.



### BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN [2004]

Arguably the best in the series and certainly the crown bearer in the *Burnout* family. It's not that *Burnout 3* was hugely innovative (except, of course, for Crash mode), but it refined everything into a very nice package. This was also the first in the series that EA published.



### BURNOUT LEGENDS [2005]

The *Burnout* series finally made a proper appearance on handheld platforms. Taking elements from all the previous games, the PSP version was solid and highly successful. In contrast, the DS version was something terrible wrapped in something smelly.



### BURNOUT REVENGE [2005]

*Revenge* was really just another more-polished iteration in the *Burnout* series, but it did introduce the insanely enjoyable ability to use traffic as a weapon. Called Traffic Checking, you could ram same-direction cars to spin out and crash, creating debris for opponents to get around and scoring yourself some boost in the process.



### BURNOUT DOMINATOR [2007]

Created to keep fans happy until *Paradise*'s release, *Dominator* wasn't developed by Criterion nor did it feature the popular Crash mode. Otherwise, it was a sleek and enjoyable racer, complete with spectacular crashes, and it boasted seriously high speeds. Still, it never felt complete without the modes that encouraged large-scale vehicular mayhem.



## CRASHING SINCE '93

Established in 1993, Criterion Software has certainly been around long enough to know its stuff. Before embarking on the *Burnout* series, the studio developed six games including high-speed bike arcade title, *Redline Racing*, and hover board tricks in *TrickStyle* and *Sub Culture* (widely considered to be the first game that supported 3D cards and Direct3D straight out of the box). It also developed a big reputation with RenderWare, its middleware engine, which became very popular during the PlayStation 2 years. Co-founded by two former Canon employees (Criterion used to be a wholly-owned subsidiary of Canon), the company is currently based in Guildford, England, and employs around 60 people. In 2004, EA bought Criterion for a rumoured £40 million.





## OVERACHIEVER

As you'd expect, *Paradise* will have many achievements (awards) that you can unlock. Here are a few of the ones we'll be going for:

**Lookin' Good** - Repair your first wrecked car;

**Great Start** - Win a race;

**Perfect Rage** - Get ten takedowns in Road Rage without wrecking;

**Daredevil** - Land a two-barrel roll jump;

**Millionaires' Club** - Score over 1,000,000 in Stunt Run;

**Car in a China Shop** - Get 500 Takedowns (incl. online and offline);

**Long Haul** - Drive 750 miles;

**Boosting Around the World** - Get a 20x boost chain;

**Rampage!** - Get a Takedown rampage; and

**Spinnin' Around** - Perform a 360° flat spin in any car.



## HEAVY METAL THUNDER

### CARMAGEDDON [1997 - 2000]

Originally envisioned as a destruction derby game, *Carmageddon* was to be the *Mad Max* game. Then it turned to potentially become the *DeathRace 2020* game. When that fell through, it became *Carmageddon*, where you drove over pedestrians to gain time and used that time to pound all that is good out of the other racers.



### TWISTED METAL [1995 - 2005]

Before David Jaffe embarked on what was to become *God of War*, he created a reputation for himself with the *Twisted Metal* games. A variety of weird characters and their vehicles were available to race in last man standing events, using cars and mounted weapons to take out any contenders.



### DEATHTRACK [1989]

Released ages ago, players took part in deadly races meant to keep post-apocalyptic America entertained. You could buy weapons, armour, and more power to try and win the many dangerous races on offer. You could even take cash offers to take out specific racers. The only problem is that a sequel still hasn't been developed.



### FLATOUT [2004 - PRESENT]

Many racers featured open circuits and going off the beaten track. However, we had to wait for *FlatOut* to introduce the 'break everything' rule of racing. In this series, trackside debris not only spills all over the place, but creates obstacles that other racers land you on the next lap! need to navigate. *FlatOut* also spared little in making the tracks as bumpy and nerve wrecking as possible. It was love at first sight.



### DESTRUCTION DERBY [1995 - 2004]

This was once one of the only real choices if you felt like running auto bodies into each other. *Destruction Derby* also brought developer Reflections into the limelight - the studio would later reach stardom with *Driver*. As the name suggests, you took your ride to a race or bowl event, trying to hit the top podium spot without your fellow racers turning your ride into scrap metal.



### HI-OCTANE [1995]

An interesting bit of trivia: *Twisted Metal* was originally to be called *High Octane*, but Bullfrog already copyrighted the name for its own racer. A change from the adventure and management games the studio usually developed, *Hi-Octane* was a futuristic weapons-based racer with great graphics (for its time) and plenty of action. Unfortunately, the upgrades and vehicles were a bit limited to make it a true classic, but it's definitely not a bad racing experience.

### INTERSTATE '76 [1997-1999]

Based in a US with an alternative history, players took their vehicles to the road to a plot involving a growing private army of dangerous drivers. The thinking man's vehicular shooter, *Interstate '76* required players to carefully plan their load-outs and missions. Not surprisingly, it used a *MechWarrior* engine.

play has conventions of waiting around for hosts to start races, or worse, not getting into games at all. Most online games also focus on world rankings, which only matter to a small minority of the people playing the game.

We set out to change all that. If we were to go all-out creating a fantastic open city, the last thing we wanted to do was essentially turn it back into a list of tracks. Therefore, the aim was to have everything open and non-linear where possible.

In online play, our goals were to make the game personal, accessible, cooperative, and seamless. We wanted no waiting around, no boring list of players and for the experience to be much more social.

Today's generation doesn't want to be prescribed to and they want to make their experiences personal. We use the PlayStation Eye and Xbox LIVE vision support to take your picture when you win an event or when another player takes you down! We send those mug shots over the network to the other players so that they can see your smugness or your dismay. These pictures can be exported to the PlayStation Network where you can look at them, print them, send them to your friends, or even upload them to a Website of your choice. This is truly an open game.

**Designing a game from scratch can leave legacy things behind. How did you make sure *Paradise* will still be 100% *Burnout* for all the fans out there?**

This was our primary objective. We had to throw everything away to get the most out of the next-gen consoles, but the game still had to feel like *Burnout*. We've spent lots of time tweaking the handling, and are extremely pleased with the results. *Burnout* fans will not be disappointed - the great feel is still there, the classic game modes are too, and there are loads of new things to learn.

**In the past, *Burnout* kept the classes apart through events. How did you balance, say, pickups vs. sports models in events in an open world such as *Paradise*?**

There are three different car types namely Stunt, Aggression, and Speed. Each has different boost types, and they have all been set up to help you in the different game modes. The beauty of the game is that the car you choose can really make a difference in how you perform in each mode. The Stunt cars are incredibly agile, great for jumps and for doing barrel rolls, but they aren't very strong, so are easier to take down. The Aggression cars, on the other hand, are really strong and great for takedowns. Speed cars allow you to chain boosts, allowing you to boost-chain across the city. As you progress, your choice of car can mean the difference between success and failure in certain events. **NAG**

# GAMING DARWINISM

**I**N A NOT TOO distant future a long long time ago, all the giant super publishers like Electronic Arts, Activision Blizzard, Ubisoft and Everyone Else Corp decided to pick up their skirts and run. A lot of stuff happened over those years, a lot of games were made and a lot of weaker developers got left behind by the herd. The gaming macrocosm herd grazed ever onward, the super publishers combining their talents and

hunger to form Electronic Activision-Blizzard UbiArts and Co, which continued to feast on the bio-survival tickets of the gamers, meaning money. The über-publishers kept producing more and more games to sate the boredom of the gaming masses, who kept handing over their bio-survival tickets for the entertainment. That's when little Timmy realised he wasn't eating cereal, but his stamp collection!

## HOSTBUSTERS

Developer→ Terminal Reality | Publisher→ Sierra | Platforms→ DS, PC, PS2, PS3, Wii, 360 | Genre→ Action | Release→ 2008

**I**T'S BEEN WELL OVER twenty years since the release of the classic comedy *Ghostbusters*. So, if you need a refresher, the movie told the story of three university researchers who got kicked out of their jobs and decided to start a business catching ghosts; not skulking around with motion-sensor cameras and reading energy fields, but with cool guns powered by nuclear reactors in backpacks. They had their work cut out of them, as a great evil wanted to enter the world via a special, dangerous building. One of the real reasons why the movie was great was thanks to the talent of people like Rick Moranis, Dan Akroyd and the never-dull Bill Murray. A few months ago, an independent team showcased their demo for a *Ghostbusters* game, but they were shut down. The reason? Sony Pictures had its own game in development, which has now officially been announced. Dan Akroyd and Harold Ramis return to the write the script, while most of the core cast have also been rounded up. This isn't the first *Ghostbusters* game to be made, but given the spate of movie-to-game remakes in the past few years, this should be a very interesting arrival.



## RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2

Developer→ Ubisoft Montreal | Publisher→ Ubisoft  
Platforms→ PC, 360 | Genre→ Tactical | Release→ March 2008

**T**HE RAINBOW SIX TEAM is back! But what did you expect, with all them terrorists running around. There are also the not-so-humble sales Vegas had racked up. Vegas is arguably one of the best action games the 360 has yet seen and a big boost for the series that has already sold over 16 million copies. Tom Clancy probably never thought his games might net him more cash than his books one day. There's no indication where *Rainbow Six* will find itself this time, though the Vegas name remains (so we can assume that the city of lights will play host again – at least a little bit). Perhaps more globe hopping will be in order. Given its success with the last title, the same team at Ubisoft Montreal is hard at work on the sequel. Expect a lot of fuss to be made about this one – it's the series' 10th anniversary in 2008.



## THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2 & 3 RETURN

Developer→ SEGA | Publisher→ SEGA | Platforms→ Wii  
Genre→ Action | Release→ Q2 2008

**T**HE ZOMBIES ARE BACK! SEGA's violent, entertaining rail shooter, *The House of the Dead*, is heading to the Wii. It plans to use the new Wii Zapper gun accessory, though we're sure your Wiimote will suffice. This release is interesting, as it will combine the second and third games in one package. The odd part about it is that the first game isn't included, which is a bit of an oversight. Everything started at the Curien mansion. Besides, these are not new games we are talking about. The third was released in 2002, so would it kill SEGA to just make this a trilogy release? But personal grudges aside, the Wii is ideal for on-rails shooters, but it hasn't had any good ones. No, scratch that. It hasn't had any at all! The platform could also do with a few mature games for the older crowd and *The House of the Dead* is pretty mature, even though the visuals will appear pretty dated by now. Don't worry – there's little chance that the awful movies will be bundled with this. If they are, just burn the DVDs.

## BLOOD BOWL

Developer → Cyanide Studios  
Publisher → Focus Home Interactive  
Platforms → PC, 360, PSP, DS  
Genre → Action, Sport | Release → 2008

**H**MM, WE'VE NEVER PLAYED *Blood Bowl*, but Ramjet, who is an alternative game nut, has the box somewhere in his house [which resembles a storage facility most of the time]. Originally released in 1987, *Blood Bowl* was a hybrid between tabletop war games and board games. You played on a board, directing a team of orcs, elves, dwarves, and humans in a fantasy game based on American football. To score was simple: get the ball to the other side. To get there was a bit harder. The point of *Blood Bowl* was to score or stop your opponent's team at all costs. It wasn't traditional football either, since *Blood Bowl* used rules and ideas from sports like rugby and even the fantasy, violence-thon *Rollerball*. Create your team, get into the game and crush the opposition! Well, that's the board game. What to expect from this digital version we don't know. Nothing has been said, but it seems simple enough. We're not expecting something involving gardening...



## POSTAL 3

Developer → Akella | Publisher → Running with Scissors | Platforms → PC, 360 | Genre → Action | Release → Q4 2008

**I**S THE WORLD REALLY ready for another *Postal*? Or, is *Postal* ready for the world? Hey, we all got a kick out of *Postal 2*. There was definitely something amusing about its antics, but it wore thin quickly. Most of us just played through the first level a few times, even trying the non-violent route (which was very boring). Soon enough, you could stick a gun up a cat's ass. Nevertheless, it was successful enough and a third game is on its way for the PC and the 360. What will it be about? You assume the role of the Postal Guy again, this time seeing how long you can handle society before you want to kill someone. Wait! That was *Postal 2*. *Postal 3* is probably the same, but with a new story no one will pay attention to and better graphics. Do we sound a bit apathetic? Probably because there really isn't space in the market for these shock games at the moment. You can get your gore and violence fix from plenty of titles. Then again, perhaps *Postal 3* will be a pleasant surprise. Oh, and Uwe Boll will be in it, so you



can shoot him. We'd buy it for just that, but what if Boll gets a cut from the royalties? Helping him fund his movies is just plain wrong.

## ALL NAG CONSOLE PREVIEWS AND REVIEWS ARE VISUALISED USING THE SAMSUNG LA46M81B LCD TV

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## WHAT WE WANT

XBOX  
LIVE

### XBOX LIVE POINTS SCRATCHCARDS

So many good Xbox LIVE Arcade titles keep coming out, and South Africa is still stuck either buying points online via dubious Websites or through importing scratchcards from the UK. We understand that Xbox LIVE is not fully supported locally yet and perhaps people don't want to give the impression that it is – but honestly, it's about time scratchcards hit the market, even if it's only just via an online ordering system to avoid storefront visibility.

### MORE WII GAMES

So the Wii has launched, and that's terrific – but only with one game? Where is our *Super Mario Galaxy*? Where is our *Metroid Prime 3*? The Wii is already having a first-party title deficit internationally, so there's no reason to aggravate matters more locally by only having one game on shelves. If the Wii is going to gain any kind of foothold in the local market, it's going to need games.

### ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

The ending of *Assassin's Creed* really makes it clear that they're planning a sequel and thankfully the sales have been good enough that Ubisoft may actually develop it. Sure, some reviews say the game is boring or something, but those reviewers are incompetent. Regardless, all the sequel would need is a new location, more crowd types to blend into and perhaps a better tutorial to teach idiot reviewers how to enjoy a game.

### MASS EFFECT PART 2

This is a no-brainer. BioWare has not released something this delicious since *Knights of the Old Republic* (let's face it, *Jade Empire* wasn't that great). *Mass Effect* really is the "next" *KOTOR*, minus only the *Star Wars* licensing (which works in its favour, in our opinion – *Star Wars* is terrific, but not every game has to be *Star Wars* themed). So, bring on Part 2 of the trilogy!

### MORE DS GAMES

There have been hundreds of new DS titles released this year alone and of course, for various reasonable reasons, South Africa doesn't get 90% of them. So here's to hoping that 2008 will see a rise in locally retailed DS software because the little handheld really deserves it. *Zelda: Phantom Hourglass* alone is worth the price of admission, especially if you are a fan of *Zelda: Windwaker*.



So, do I look better with this one or this one?

## ARMY OF TWO

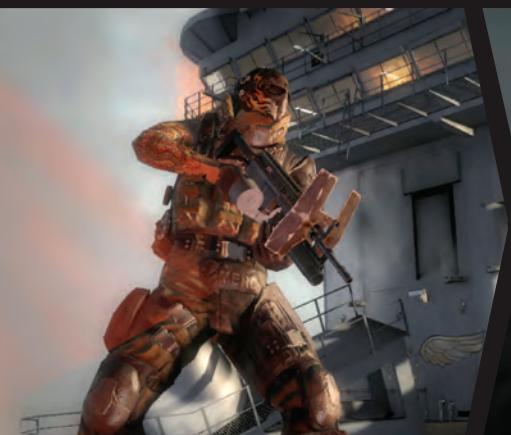
**W**AR WITH A SOUNDTRACK. Yup, that's probably the best way to define this game. Seriously, if what you think *Army of Two* might be doesn't fit that description, we need to talk. You've obviously got your facts wrong. This latest full metal jacket offering from EA is nothing other than mercenary cool. Then again, perhaps the protective masks the main characters wear - better suited for pro-wrestlers, serial killers or Mad Max villains than soldiers - told us all of that already. *Army of Two* is Rock n' Roll, baby. War zone thunder. War with a soundtrack.

That was the first big impression to hit NAG while playing the game. Recently EA South Africa gave us the opportunity to play through a Beta build and for the next few hundred words, this article will tell you why it rocks. The next few words will tell you: don't worry, *Army of Two* is awesome.

An interesting thing is happening here. One question that came to mind is whether EA jumped on the bandwagon when co-op suddenly took a turn for the big league with *Gears of War* or if a clever designer or producer had the idea for a while and pitched it at the right time. So far everything around the game suggests the former: *Army of Two* looks interesting, but it also looks typical. As if EA decided it can make a *Gears of War* too, but with groovy hip lingo that the kids use today. If that is the case, then the team behind this game need to be watched closely. They can obviously work miracles. Because it feels more like *Army of Two* resulted from someone having a damn good idea. A game with co-op really built into the fundamentals.

As is often the case when a new idea surfaces, there are probably games before *Army of Two* that used co-op as an absolute

gameplay element. But we're not talking about "Dom, shine the light for me" moments here. *Army of Two* presents the level of co-op gameplay where just watching the movie makes you start to cringe over whether the team AI will have a clue what to do. Usually the best you can hope for with an AI teammate is that it will be very accurate and won't get stuck walking into a wall. How would it handle this? Terrifically. But this you should really do with a buddy. This? As you might know, *Army of Two* takes two mercenaries into various near-future conflict zones where they have to complete their mission and remove any combatants between them and their objective. It's far more *Rambo* than *Black Hawk Down*. Since there are two main characters, that means two people can play. As such, *Army of Two* makes heavy use of co-op tactics.





The main co-op system is called AGGRO. Let's ignore what it stands for - AGGRO is represented by a half-circle indicator on the screen. If the arm on the circle moves into one player's quarter, that quarter starts filling with red. This means that the enemy's attention is on that character (fittingly, since you gain AGGRO by shooting at the enemy) and the other player becomes near invisible to the enemy. If that player wishes to be the object of the enemy's affection, he starts shooting at them until the AGGRO skips over to his side of the indicator. In other words, it's a cover-fire system for dummies - and it works well. In this writer's opinion, it's probably the best cover fire system since *Brothers in Arms* let you get unlimited ammo from your soldiers. AGGRO inspires a basic buddy system where you have to cover each other's asses.

The list goes on. If one player goes down in combat, depending on the injuries, the other player can either drag him to safety or apply a quick patch job. In true combat tradition, first aid plugging the bullet wound with a tampon.

In this event, the game world greys out to only the two players. Each player has to tap a simple sequence of buttons - do this right and you're back and fighting fit. If a player gets dragged out of the hotspot instead, he can still shoot and give his buddy cover. This latch-on co-op mode happens a few times: in some spots the duo will be surrounded by the enemy, so they stand back to back and provide 360-degree fire. If one rips a door off a car and uses it as a shield, the other can step in behind him. Now the second player doesn't need to move around - just shoot while the first player does the walking with the door as cover. Finally, there's the co-op sniping, where both players shoot two targets at the same time (useful for traps).

But you might know all of this already. What our time with the game has confirmed, though, is that it works. Really well. *Army of Two* isn't a very deep experience. You will run and gun your way through it. But the co-op system gives you more options in how you react during a battle and AGGRO makes it intuitive to coordinate your combat strategy.

with your foul-mouthed cohort. Yup, it's a mature game and the language is raunchy (but actually really entertaining) out of the box. The cover system also makes life easier. It's a bit simpler than *Gears of War*, though. There is no sprint button, but the Y button is context sensitive. If you are far enough from cover, Y will rush the character to it. If you are against cover, Y will make him vault over. No cover? Y executes a nice duck-and-roll. The trigger buttons are very *GOW*, though: simply pressing the right one from cover unleashes a rather accurate blind fire, but hold in left and your character peeks out of cover for a more accurate aim. The control system is solid and simple. It's also impossible to get lost, thanks to the GPS button.

*Army of Two* oozes attitude in a very politically-incorrect way - it's strange to see EA produce such an unclinical game. With the major rush of the season past us, the question gamers ask right now is "what's next?" *Army of Two* is next. And if you don't like that, it might punch you in the gut. **NAG**  
**James Francis**



# MINI#37

**T'S EASY TO BE** inspired by this job. It gets under your skin - all the passion surrounding this modern art form.

It's even more exciting when it's the local gaming scene you're focusing on. Could the next big gaming smash hit come from SA? *MINI#37* could well be the break the fledgling SA industry needs.

Just what is it? Well, originally the game was conceived as a marketing value-add of sorts with the introduction of the new, second-generation MINI. I remember the video of the game on the press flash drive I received when I attended the SA launch of this car in Cape Town. It sure looked pretty enough...

However, it hasn't exactly progressed much since then. In fact, *MINI#37* is now to be released as an episodic, freely downloadable game, essentially to promote the services of Luma Arcade, the newly formed game studio.

So, it's an arcade racer, featuring just

one model line: the MINI. Fortunately, it isn't only the Gen 2 model either - the game includes classic MINIs and various prototypes and one-offs as well. Moreover, the racing takes place on local SA streets, with tracks including the Nelson Mandela Bridge in Newtown, the Waterfront in Cape Town, and other recognisable SA venues.

It looks pretty good, despite our preview code including some texture and visible clipping area problems. However, that's where the positives end.

The car feels like you're trying to hustle along a dead cat. The sound effects are some of the worst I've heard since I last fired up *Game Over* on my ZX Spectrum 48. The 'Win' button is to keep the throttle nailed and crash into all barriers as they don't hinder your speed at all, blasting the nitrous away on the straights to stay ahead of the amazingly dense AI vehicles, which will just cause you to crash into them.



dramatically slowing your ride in the process.

Tracks are passable, but consist of straight-lined geometric shapes, which your MINI jostles over with little semblance of real control and absolutely no involvement at all.

I really hate to lay into the efforts of a developer like this, especially a local one who I'd love to throw my support behind, but the product has to support this enthusiasm at least on a basic level. *MINI#37* fails to do that. The fact that it is free and incorporates multiplayer aspects via top scores updated live to the Luma Website (not in the demo version) has to count for something.

However, it still doesn't make *MINI#37* a recommendable playing experience from the standpoint of this preview at least. Perhaps some more effort could be lavished upon it and the title rejuvenated, but it needs a lot more to be ready for public enjoyment. **NAG**

**Russell Bennett**

SIGNAL LOST

S.O.S.

SIGNAL LOST

S.O.S.

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# ELVEON

**HOLD ONTO YOUR SECRET** history hats. Everyone, as we're swept back through the swirling mists of time immemorial to an age of legends so legendary that the merest thought of committing them to permanent record seemed a blasphemy too profound to violate. Until now, that is, because NAG treads boldly where lesser publications dare not, and that's why you give us R39.00 every month in hazard pay.

So the gods, the ineffable but not-so-infallible Nímas, created the terrestrial paradise of Naon in an unspecified number of days. Encouraged by the roaring success [Light! Trees! Styrofoam!] of this impulsive bit of arts and crafts, the Nímas went on to build some sort of magical sparkly city, called Nimathar, with a big tower block in the middle called Daíeos, where they put their offices and boardrooms and stuff. And they gazed upon it, stroking long beards that trailed off into the inky depths of yawning eternity, and decided that this great metropolis needed people with pointy ears. So they created the Elves and named them Néamas, and they all moved in together and were totally cool until an unspeakable cataclysm rocked their happy existence. In a grand display of confidence, the Nímas promptly abandoned their children. The once-proud city fell, and a great Elvish diaspora followed. Social division and wars ensued with the dull clang of inevitability, and memories of Nimathar's unlucky fate were eclipsed by the petty affairs of day-to-day life.

Now, many ages later, an elite Elvish

warrior has decided to reclaim the all but forgotten city of his ancestors. [Fade to black.] This is his story. [Fade to black.]

*Elveon* (fictional Elvish language for "The Book of Elves") is an Unreal Engine 3-powered, third-person action RPG, in development since 2002 by Slovakian company, 10tacle Studios, and based on an original story penned by 10tacle's own studio leader, Stavo Hazucha.

It's very combat-centric. In fact, the team hired their very own martial arts crew, who developed a unique Elvish fighting style and then trotted off into a motion-capture studio to strut their stuff. The result is four distinct combat classes – bow, spear, sword, and dagger – each of which, for the purposes of the game, is governed by a particular deity. The RPG model is limited to periodic stat upgrades in the player's chosen weapon area, disguised presumably as moments of divine epiphany or something. Moreover, rumour has it that the PC version might include somewhat more developed RPG elements to lure in the D20-rolling *Neverwinter Nights* crowd.

"With *Elveon* we will introduce a completely new and exciting fantasy universe," says Hazucha. "I would not say at this point that the game is going to be a franchise, but there will be definitely some more chapters to open in this book." In the meantime, however, *Elveon* promises 15-30 hours of butch Elves and high adventure, depending on the severity of your compulsion to uncover the dark bits of the map. **NAG**

**Tarryn van der Byl**



# 47% Cooler!

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By providing a dual path cooling system, you will be able to cool down the MOSFET, Northbridge and Southbridge chips at the same time - rendering pure heatpipe designs a trend of the past, and defeats all the copycat designs that rely only on "artistic" designs on their thermal systems. Even if you don't utilize a water cooling solution, the Fusion Block System features a heatpipe that connects the Southbridge, Northbridge and the MOSFET, directing heat from the Southbridge towards



the MOSFET heatsink for easy heat dissipation. Another point to note is cost savings. Previous water cooled solutions require many water blocks to be connected to individual parts like the CPU, Southbridge, Northbridge MOS etc - raising your costs. By taking the entire integrated solution into design considerations, you will enjoy exceptional thermal performance to the Northbridge, Southbridge, Crosslinx, and even VRM with a single connection - lowering temperatures by up to 47% for better overclocking results, and saving you money at the same time.

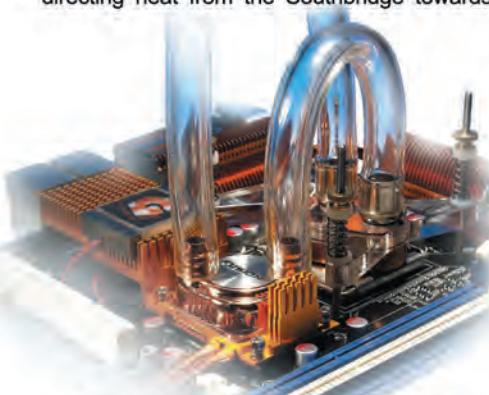
### Easy Overclocking with CPU Level Up

The ROG Maximus Extreme / Formula Series allows flexible and cost-free CPU upgrading with the exclusive CPU Level Up feature. This feature allows easily upgradeable CPU performances without prior overclocking knowledge. Simply pick the processor speed you want in the user-friendly interface, and the motherboard will do the rest - overclocking has never been easier! This

way, you can save even more money - and still enjoy instant performance upgrades. Overclocking enthusiasts can also make use of the CPU Level Up result to adjust settings for even higher frequencies.

### Extreme Graphical Performances with Crosslinx

Unsurpassed graphical performance and achieving the best gaming potentials have always been ROG's credo. The ROG Maximus Extreme motherboard will let you achieve this level with its multiple GPU support and Crosslinx technology that features a dedicated graphics controller for optimized PCIe allocation with dual x8 lanes - providing x16, x8, x8 PCIe allocation with its Triple-CrossFire setting. This balances the GPU speeds with all the PCIe lanes coming from the north bridge without DMI bottlenecks - a problem faced by previous x16 x16 x4 standards. This dual x8 PCIe lane technology is the key in setting higher 3DMark world records and providing smoother gameplay with higher frame rates.



▲ Fusion Block System provides outstanding cooling



## GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

**KRATOS IS SO DEITY-DAMNED** awesome, he looks good no matter what platform he's on. It could be that developer Ready at Dawn is simply very good at developing for the PSP (their previous title, *Daxter*, remains one of the most fantastic-looking PSP games to date), but we'd like to give Kratos credit for his godly good looks.

There is a particular scene in the recently-released demo UMD that we feel accurately sums up Ready at Dawn's impeccable handling of the series subject matter: Kratos is fighting some Persians, knocking them down and stomping on their heads, which explode in a gush of red particles, when suddenly a cyclops bursts in through the doors and tries to smash Kratos with a giant wooden mallet. Kratos defends himself (by having you mash a button in a test of thumb strength), throwing the cyclops back and just when you think you're going to be fighting him, a giant two-story tall Basilisk sticks its head through the doors, chomping the cyclops down in one bite. Then Kratos fights the Basilisk, and it's classic Kratos vs. Mythology action and every bit as epic as we've come to expect from the series.

*Chains of Olympus* is a prequel to the series, chronicling the various adventures of Kratos throughout his ten years of servitude to the Gods of Olympus (hence the game's title, which implies a bond between the protagonist and the deities). The controls are mostly unchanged except for a nip and tuck here and there to make allowances for the reduced buttons on the PSP.

Even though the PSP doesn't have the same kind of power as the PlayStation 2, *Chains of Olympus* looks every bit as good as *God of War* 2, although close scrutiny will reveal lower polygon counts on the characters and environments, (the fluid animations more than masks this trivial issue). The demo, along with the various developer walkthrough trailers online, confirm that *Chains of Olympus* is everything a *God of War* fan could want, if you want some portable Kratos for your PSP. There really isn't anything more to say: it's *God of War*, it's by Ready at Dawn, it's on PSP and it's a prequel. **NAG**

Miktar "Gawd of Rawr" Dracon

Always check the weather  
before mindless slaughter



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If Salvador Dali and Simon Bisley were ninja turtles



# ALIENS VS. PREDATOR: REQUIEM

**S**IERRA IS BRINGING A new instalment of the *Aliens vs. Predator* tale to gamers, with the help of developers Rebellion. The idea of the acid-blooded Aliens fighting against the brutally efficient Predators is hardly new; a comic series was produced over ten years ago and, fairly recently, a rather awful movie covered the same topic. It's not new to computer and videogames either... AvP scored a big hit at the NAG offices a few years back.

This new PSP game puts the player in control of a lone Predator hunting down Aliens that have been let loose upon the planet Earth. We were fortunate enough to get a hands-on session with the game and, from what we saw, it looks to be a promising and challenging title.

As the player progresses through the title, he/she will gain honour points. The predators are big on honour, which can be used to

upgrade weapons, among other things. Speaking of weapons, all the old favourites from the Predator arsenal are present, as well as a few new ones. Wrist blades, laser trip mines and dual shoulder cannons are but a few of the weapons that this game will present for the player to use. In addition, other Predator technology is also present in the form of different vision modes. These include standard thermographic vision, as well as 'Alien vision', which reveals the enemy in stark contrast. The Predator will also be able to use the famous cloak to hide from unsuspecting humans. The cloak doesn't really work on Aliens, though. That would just make the game far too easy.

At the time of playing, AvP: Requiem's graphics were looking top notch; they are clear and feature excellent animations, all set in vibrant and interesting environments.



The game is a third-person adventure, so a variable camera is very important. This is taken care of by the assignment of camera rotation to the shoulder buttons, and fast moving Alien targets can be tagged to help the player stay on top of the situation. The control scheme promises to be fairly simple, but will still require the player to do a bit of learning... after all, with all that Predator tech to play with, things might get a bit complicated.

Although it is touted as being a "lone Predator" kind of affair, a multiplayer mode is also available, allowing a group of Predators to open an intergalactic can of whip-ass on the unsuspecting (yet thoroughly creepy) Aliens.

With upgradeable weapons, great graphics and effective controls, *Aliens vs. Predator: Requiem* is shaping up to be a good way to kill a few hours... and a few Aliens. **NAG**

**Walt Pretorius**

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## DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI TENKAICHI

Developer→ Spike | Namco Bandai | Publisher→ Atari | Genre→ Fighting | Release→ Q4 2007

**THIS GAME WAS FIRST** published in Japan as *Dragon Boru Zetto Supakingu! Meteor* ("Dragon Ball Z: Sparking! Meteor"), then re-branded as *Budokai Tenkaichi 3* (more or less, "Strongest Under the Heavens Martial Arts Tournament") for its worldwide release. Despite the name, however, this game is not actually part of the *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai* series. That's almost as inscrutable and confusing as an actual episode of the show.

Anyway, much like its predecessors (and, as it happens, the *Budokai* series to which it is not actually otherwise related), it's a natty cell-shaded brawler featuring a humongous roster of more than 150 combatants with high-

maintenance hairstyles to pick and choose from, including everyone from *Budokai Tenkaichi 2* as well as a number of characters created exclusively for the release. There are 35 stages, packing all sorts of destructible props for big impact satisfaction. Each battle consists of only a single round, but Strongest Under the Heavens Martial Arts Tournament contestants – being, of course, the strongest under the heavens – have multi-layered health bars, so hewing those down can take a fair bit of button-mangling.

In addition to the standard fare of kicking, punching, and trying to look hardcore in brightly-coloured jumpsuits straight out of

a 1986 Van Halen video, *Budokai Tenkaichi 3* introduces a Battle Replay Mode so that you can revisit past glories of kicking, punching, and trying to look hardcore in brightly-coloured jumpsuits straight out of a 1986 Van Halen video. Also new to the series is a day/night cycle and something called the "Disc Fusion System". The latter allows PS2 players who own previous iterations of the series to insert these discs during play and unlock the Ultimate Battle Z mode. The Wii version, meanwhile, includes online multiplayer support, including a rankings system – another first for the series. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl



## SAMURAI WARRIORS: KATANA

Developer→ KOEI | Publisher→ KOEI | Genre→ Action | Release→ Jan 08

**THE NEXT INSTALMENT IN** KOEI's *Dynasty Warriors* and *Samurai Warriors* series is coming up soon and this time it is on the Wii. As before, players will get to experience multiple-enemy fighting while having to plan a simple strategy (which we loved in the previous games), but with one added difference. The Wii Remote now comes into play. Now, every thrust and swing you make with your controls actually results in something onscreen, adding a new facet to the gameplay set in feudal Japan. Unlike the

previous titles in the series, which drew heavy criticism for their lack of variety in gameplay, *KATANA* will feature constantly changing battle dynamics. This means that while a simple gung-ho strategy might be good for one situation, a more tactical and cautious approach might be needed for the next. The game will offer a hundred different missions in which players will have to rescue maidens from burning castles, explore ninja-filled caves or even repel a pirate invasion.

Whatever the case may be, *Samurai*

*Warriors: KATANA* will ensure a good physical workout for the player because of the excellent control scheme of the game. From everything seen so far, a simple battle will see the player having to flex muscles in ways he/she would not normally do while playing a videogame. Although *KATANA* has already been released in Japan, it will still be a while before it hits our shelves, but at least it looks like it will be well worth the wait. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



## WIPEOUT HD

Developer → SCE Studio Liverpool | Publisher → Sony Computer Entertainment | Genre → Racing | Release → TBA

**T**O KEEP THE "NEXT-GEN" chasers" happy until a proper *Wipeout* appears for the PS3 in 2008, there is *Wipeout HD* (working title). A downloadable game, *Wipeout HD* will be purchasable from the online PlayStation Store via your PS3. It will feature remastered, high-definition fan-favourite tracks from previous *Wipeout* games, fully reworked to take advantage of the higher resolution and additional power the PS3 provides.

There will be five game modes (previously seven), including Single Race and Zone Mode.

Elimination and Head 2 Head were recently removed from the feature list. The nine fully licensed music tracks will be remixed in Dolby 5.1 sound.

Pricing has yet to be confirmed, but we guess it'll be around the R300 mark (this is just an educated guess based on *Warhawk*, not to be taken as gaming gospel). The confirmed teams so far (eight are to be included) are AG Systems and Feisar. Confirmed tracks are Chenghou Project, Anulpha Pass and Sebenco Peak (all from *Wipeout Pure*).

The game will run at 1080p at a promised 60 frames per second (which in the case of *Wipeout* represents smooth perfection). Players will have the option (thank the gaming gods) of steering the anti-gravity racing vehicles using the SIXAXIS tilt functionality. Online multiplayer modes are also confirmed but exact details are still sketchy.

The promised Photo Mode is missing from the recent feature list, possibly axed due to time constraints. **NAG**

**Miktar Dracon**

## ESCAPE FROM PARADISE CITY

Developer → Sirius Games | Publisher → Focus Home Interactive | Genre → RPG | Release → October 2007

**I**N A FAR FROM original storyline, *Paradise City* sees the people of the United States infected with a bizarre disease which mutates them into (surprise, surprise) zombies hungry for blood. Of course, a top-secret government agency has managed to contain the spread of the plague throughout the country somewhat by destroying the creatures' nests, but has discovered a pattern that points to Paradise City as the source of the problem. However, the top-secret government agency has no control over Paradise City, which is run by a combination of criminal families, street gangs and corrupt officials. Naturally, it is not long before your character learns that, as well as a deadly and dangerous disease

emanating from the city, there is a secret society organising the gang wars and waging war for control of the city; thus the need for an undercover agent to infiltrate the workings of Paradise City and find out what is really going on in a city that belies its name. The best person for the job, it seems, is someone with inherent criminal tendencies, and so players can choose between Nicholas Port, a former bank robber, Boris Chekov, a corrupt FBI agent, and Angel Vargas, a street fighter on death row for killing a fellow inmate during a prison fight.

Once players have chosen their character, their mission is to take control of a gang and establish their own turf. After

this has been accomplished, players will need to extend their influence over the city by capturing other districts (of which there are more than 80 in the game) from rival gangs. Each area has different resources such as weapons and ammunition, hotels (which can be 'relieved' of their earnings), corrupt police stations with which you can form alliances, and skills. As part of the character development system, these skills, of which there are over 50, including the ability to call for backup or 'mark' a foe, are vital to complete the various missions, which bring in valuable resources that are scattered throughout Paradise City. **NAG**

**Megan Hughes**



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## KILLZONE 2

Developer → Guerrilla | Publisher → SCEE | Genre → Action | Release → TBA

FANS OF *KILLZONE* WILL be happy to know that the next instalment will soon be out. It will be released for the PS3 and has been named *Killzone 2*, although it is the third instalment in the series. From what has been seen of the game so far, the graphics look to be extremely well thought out. However, it is not known how much of this was pre-rendered.

The storyline this time seems to focus on the Helghast home planet of Helghan, which is being invaded by the ISA. It is because of this that many of the scenes depict full-scale street battles with the player assuming the role of Sev, a battle-hardened member of the

elite Legion squadron. The ISA also quickly discovers how formidable the Helghast are on their home planet. It is the beginning of the end for one of them, and it is up to you, the player, to figure out which one will fall.

From what has been released to the press so far, *Killzone 2* will also feature various multiplayer modes that will make full use of the PlayStation Network. *Killzone 2* is expected to be released sometime in the early months of 2008, and players should get ready for it because it looks set to be one of the best first-person shooters for the PS3. So, get ready, get amped; it is time for war! **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



## DESTROY ALL HUMANS! BIG WILLY UNLEASHED

Developer → THQ | Publisher → THQ | Genre → Action | Release → 2008

THQ CREATED QUITE A stir when it released *Destroy All Humans!* a few years ago, and seems set to continue the trend. *Destroy All Humans!*, with its off-beat sense of humour and fun pokes at the sci-fi classics of yesteryear, became enough of a cult classic to spawn sequels, of which this particular title (with the rather suggestive name *Big Willy Unleashed*) is the second.

And thankfully, it is a true sequel. The story continues (this time during the 1970s) with Crypto coming back to Earth to do some genetic sampling on the hapless humans he encounters. The reason: well, it seems that the little grey hero and his species lack certain anatomical parts (genitals, to be precise) and want to make a few changes.

The game dynamic also feels pretty much

like a sequel, with most of the weapons and items having been seen and used before. In fact, the only real difference is the setting, which has been updated by around a decade or so. PS2 players can expect more of what they have become accustomed to in this game – travelling around, blowing stuff up and, of course, rapid-fire anal probes.

Wii players, on the other hand, have an all-new experience waiting for them as *Destroy All Humans!* makes its debut on the Nintendo console. The control scheme that the Wii uses might be very different from what PS2 players will be getting to grips with, but essentially the game is identical on the two different platforms. Wii players can expect a lot of aiming and 'shooting' at the screen. Possessing a human, for example, will require



a certain button combination on the PS2, while Wii players will have to aim at and shoot targets on screen within a certain time limit.

*Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed* also introduces Big Willy, a giant fast-food mascot that can be controlled by the player. This slow-moving behemoth is very powerful, which will make smashing the fully destructible environment even more fun.

And, as to be expected, the humour is still wacky, with more than a few references to... groin bits.

It may not shape up to be game of the year, but *Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed* will find a nice comfortable niche in the cult-gaming market. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Crypto with a Wii? The jokes write themselves



# INSECTICIDE

Developer→ Crackpot Entertainment | Publisher→ Crackpot Media | Genre→ Action/Adventure | Release→ Q1 2008

**A**LMOST ALL GAMES SET in the future feature a poor outlook for the human race, where humans have maimed the planet through internal wars and the battle against other creatures. Insecticide is no different in this regard, with humans having been reduced, through overuse of pesticides, to a primitive primate species that must wear special suits to survive. Of course, the now human sized and highly intelligent insect species, whose evolution included developing immunity to the radioactive chemicals floating in air, have taken control of the planet.

And, for once, the mission of the main character is not to change that fact. Actually, the main character is six-limbed Insecticide Detective Chrys Liszt who, along with her partner, Roachy Caruthers,

is out to solve two murders. One, a recent murder at the Nectarola soft drink company and, the other, an unsolved cold-case murder from Roachy's past. Both of which are somehow intertwined in an even bigger mystery that you need to get to the bottom of.

The team behind this game, consisting mostly of veterans from LucasArts' glory days, has built in two very different styles of gameplay. Some levels will consist of jumping from different platforms in a city designed for creatures that do just that, while dealing with some bad bugs intent on closing down your investigation. The other half of the game will see players solving puzzles in a more methodical, though often ridiculous and humorous, manner, much

like the famous adventure games *Escape from Monkey Island* and *Grim Fandango*. You will also get the chance to partake in hostage negotiations, endure long stakeouts and interrogate prisoners to help further the investigation and unravel the story that links the two murders.

But you won't be left defenceless. A number of weapons, such as a Pollen Gun, which can be upgraded as the story progresses, will help Detective Chrys solve the case without becoming the next victim. Close combat is also an option if you run out of ammo and can get close enough to the enemy, while health can be restored by collecting Nectarola cans found around the city. **NAG**

**Megan Hughes**

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## SHED NO TEARS

THERE'S THE HARDCORE - A HERO WHO KNOWS WHAT HE, SHE (OR 300 OF THEM) ARE DOING. THEY ARE GOOD AT THEIR JOB, WHICH USUALLY INVOLVES STOMPING THE BAD GUYS. YOU ALSO GET THE RAMBO. THIS CHARACTER GOES IN GUNS BLAZING, BLOWING UP EVERYTHING IN SIGHT. CONSIDERS WMDs REASONABLE FOR CLOSE-QUARTER COMBAT. THEN WE HAVE THE BAD-ASS. IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN WHAT MAKES THIS CHARACTER DIFFERENT FROM THE HEROES AND THE RAMBOS. IT'S NOT THAT THEY ARE USUALLY ANTI-HEROES. IT'S REALLY JUST THAT FOR THEM TEARING A GIANT MONSTER A NEW ONE IS ABOUT THE SAME AS YOU OR ME GOING TO BUY MILK. THE CURRENT WEARER OF THAT CROWN, IF ONE REALLY NEEDED TO BE HANDED OUT, WOULD DESERVINGLY BE KRATOS, THE DEMI-GOD FROM GOD OF WAR. BUT IF YOU DETERMINE YOUR BAD-ASS QUOTA IN HOW FREQUENTLY, HEAVILY AND STYLISHLY THE LEAD BEATS ON ITS ENEMIES, THEN THOSE WHO HAVE PLAYED IT WOULD QUICKLY POINT TO DEVIL MAY CRY AND ITS 'PARANORMAL INVESTIGATOR', DANTE.

**D**ANTE DOESN'T REALLY INVESTIGATE. Not if the average P.I.'s job involves taking sword and gun to countless demons popping out of everywhere. Then again, Dante has an edge to him. He is the half-human son of the demon Sparda, who is worshipped by an obscure cult called the Order of the Sword. Like Dante, they also go after demons and dispatch them to other realms. Now this might all confuse Dante with some kind of techno-knight, brandishing a sword and royal blood. The problem is that knights can't move like Dante does, especially not to the rhythm of a hard rock sound track. Able to bolt upwards and to the sides with incredible speed, Dante is really fast. Fast enough to punch an enemy into the air, then jump up to deliver several more painful blows. Or rather, keep the enemy up there with the constant blast of bullets unleashed from Dante's dual pistols. In *DMC* the main character can switch weapons on the fly, allowing players to create vast combos of blows as they shoot in an area full of monsters, landing blows and bullets as they move. The game takes advantage of this: the longer you sustain a combo using alternating moves, the higher your score counter. These points help upgrade your character. But even if you just want to bash buttons, *DMC* has always delivered.

Fans might know, though, that the fourth game does not only star Dante. In fact, the usual lead guy only becomes playable near to the end. The majority of screen time will belong to Nero, a newcomer

to the series. In a strange twist, Dante attacks and kills some of the Order's members - truly a treasonous act. Nero, a member of the Order, decides to go after Dante. But he also needs to do some demon hunting. That ensures a large berth in the fighting variety as he goes after a demon lord and its minions. One of the early bosses, a four-legged beast called Berial, is already an imposing sight and a sign of things to come. Glimpses of other boss characters show huge monsters and there is even a boss fight against Dante, serving as a tutorial. *DMC 4* is definitely not holding back - just like the weapons, players will be able to switch through Dante's four different styles on the fly.

*Devil May Cry* is a firm favourite at the NAG offices. Very few games deliver the same kind of addictive action that the series does. It goes beyond just pounding buttons. *DMC* introduced method to the madness with the fluid combo system, something that successors like *God of War* have adopted for themselves. It's the return of the cheesy story, silly dialogue, really elaborate characters and non-stop combat. Best of all, this will be the series' first move into the next-generation, so expect the graphics to be really good. Good enough for Hiroyuki Kobayashi, *DMC 4*'s producer, to say: "It's more than just a game, and it's better than a movie, because we've thought about the story, made the graphics look beautiful. We've put a lot of work into it."



The Red Queen really is a piece of work. If the name isn't intimidating enough, Nero can twist the grip and rev up power for a power attack.





For the last part of the game, you will be back with the hardcore Dante, who sports a new gauntlet that shoots spikes and a pair of metal wings for getting air. Oh, and he has a briefcase that can, amongst several things, become a missile platform.

Meet Blue Rose, a sassy lady that can shoot two slugs at once, strong enough to pound through nearly anything. Nero is the only Order of the Sword member who uses a firearm.

## WHAT ABOUT DANTE?

Devil May Cry 4 brings with it a new lead character, the white-haired, sword-wielding, gun-touting Nero. But don't confuse him with Dante, the usual white-haired, sword-wielding, gun-toting protagonist in the series. See, Nero's got a black cloak. But this goes beyond aesthetics. Unlike Dante, Nero can't turn into a more powerful demon form. He is, as far as we know, 100% human. But at some point he was imbued with the Devil Bringer. Occupying his right arm, it shoots out a tendril and snags enemies keeping their distance. But Dante isn't left entirely in the cold. According to Capcom, Nero takes up around 70% of the game, but for the rest you will play as the demon Sparda's son. Initially Nero goes after Dante after he witnesses the original devil hunter kill several Order of the Sword members (which is weird as the Order supposedly also hunts devils). But as a member of the order he has to also kill demons and a lot of the missions will require seriously kicking hellspawn ass all the way to their colossal boss. Eventually, though, the story gets to Dante, who is obviously not the bad guy in all of this. The only worrying thing is that it almost sounds like DMC is trying to draw to an end.

Originally designed for Dante back in *DMC 1*, The Devil Bringer does what it says on the label. It can pull in enemies from a distance, throw them around and pound them into the ground. Also useful for wide gaps.

## BEGINNER'S LUCK

The developers have made it pretty clear what is being focused on the most with *DMC 4*. Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi explained that he's sure fans will adore *DMC 4*, it's also meant to give new players a stab at the addictive gameplay, especially the PC and 360 gamers. Like the game before it, *DMC 4* wants to make things easy to get into. As such, the difficulty curve starts easy enough, but in no time players will face the colossal Berial, a four-hooved horned giant with a sword flaming about as much as he does. If this is indication of the scale of things to come, it's easy to believe *DMC 4*'s director, Hideaki Itsuno, when he says by the later part of the game, *DMC 4* will be harder than the third before it.

Still, the team is certain this is not a problem. By the time players reach that stage, they will look back and be in full control of things. That's why Capcom focused a lot on the control system and making the characters very easy to control.





## RETURN OF THE FEMME FATALES

The team at Capcom admitted it: the *Devil May Cry* series is popular among guys, as producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi pointed out. “[So] we always put in a nice sexy character,” he explained. But *DMC 4* is also a reunion. Trish, a secret character from *DMC 2*, and Lady, the missile-launching biker in *DMC 3*, are back to cause their own kinds of trouble. *DMC 4* also introduces Gloria, a warrior executive in the Order of the Sword and Kobayashi’s example of the ‘babe’ factor. Kyrie, another newcomer, is a much more demure character. The sister of the order’s leader, she sings at their festivals and might have a fling with new lead-guy Nero. What else would you expect? Apparently they were childhood friends. It’s Romantic. After all, Capcom doesn’t want *Devil May Cry* to be seen as just a guy game with swords and guns...

## EVERYBODY WINS

Two interesting things happened in the past year or so between Capcom and the next-generation consoles. The first was *Devil May Cry* jumping ship and becoming a multi-platform game. The series has traditionally been bound to Sony’s platforms and *DMC* became one of the first of several major departures from the PlayStation 3’s exclusives list. Then, recently, Capcom announced that *Lost Planet*, the bugs-and-parties shooter, will be headed to the PS3 after quite a few months on the 360 and

PC. In fact, it was almost unexpected. The two events are connected. When Capcom started working on *Lost Planet* and *Dead Rising*, it also developed MT Framework, a multi-million dollar engine for the major platforms. MT games are developed on PC and then taken to their final platform: PC, 360 or, now, PS3. *Devil May Cry 4* is the first PS3 game using the system, and obviously *Lost Planet* is another. So while the PS3 lost its exclusivity, this means Capcom games can appear on all three those platforms. Unfortunately, the game’s producer says the game is too big for the Wii. **NAG**

## WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

### CALL OF DUTY 4 [PC]

Have you played *Call of Duty 4* yet? Why not? That's not a good enough reason, you should go and play it right now. The single-player experience is nothing short of incredible and the multiplayer has unexpected depth with its class and skill system. That aside, the *Call of Duty* series is known for its visceral single-player campaign and *CoD4* delivers that in spades. We're digging it.

### MASS EFFECT [360]

Glorious day, an RPG that doesn't either involve being stuck in a sandbox with sand up your virtual tights, or trapped in the grip of a linear storyline so overly dramatic it may as well be opera. *Mass Effect* balances action with plot in such a way that it may even get the FPS adrenal-junkies actually interacting with a plot more complicated than 'go here, shoot this, you win'.

### ASSASSIN'S CREED [360]

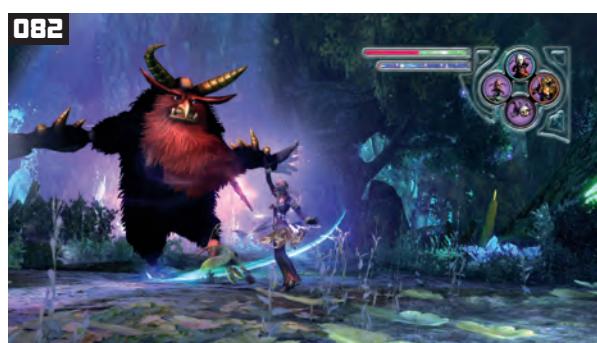
Some reviews online say it's crap. We think those reviewers should be ashamed of themselves. *Assassin's Creed* delivers a sterling experience, fresh and invigorating. Yes, it's slightly lean on the subjective variety – but the various elements introduced are eventually mixed up to great effect. A simple pickpocket mission becomes much more, once some monks and guards get involved.

### RIFFS: EVERYDAY SHOOTER [PS3]

There is no way to describe *Everyday Shooter*, except that it's got some real melody to it. As a shooter it presents some innovative ideas and levels, but as an experience it melds music and action into one synergistic package. It's a shame that there is no PC version available. This would have done terrific on Steam or other digital distribution services. It's a little niche, sure – but isn't niche just another way of saying "popular, but just not with everyone?"

### BEATS. [PSP]

You could say this is finally the answer to *Daigassol Band Brothers!* on the DS. It's a rhythm game, but it generates the patterns based on the beats in the music. You can play along to any song on your PSP, or even jam your own song using the built in synth. Those 'jam' songs can then be played as a pattern, single-player or even wireless multiplayer. Available from the PlayStation Store (without needing a PS3!) at <https://store.playstation.com/>.



## WEB SCORES

### CALL OF DUTY 4 [PC]



NAG	96
METACRITIC	93
GAMERANKINGS	95

### ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS [PC]



NAG	79
METACRITIC	84
GAMERANKINGS	84

### FOLKLORE [PS3]



NAG	90
METACRITIC	74
GAMERANKINGS	76



## TO HOLMGARD AND BEYOND!

The NAG warlords have summoned their thanes and thralls, and set sail for great adventure.

### James Francis

This grizzled warlord once bested Odin himself in a battle of wits. He doesn't remember it, though.



### Miktar Dracon

Miktar came along for the free mead and fury boots.



### Adam Liebman

This Viking is a level-six druid, and can cast Summon Dire Badger.



### Eddie Francis

Eddie and his berserker horde are feared at all-you-can-eat buffets across Denmark.



### Walt Pretorius

This Viking is at the cutting edge of arctic fashion, because his girlfriend buys his clothes.



### Alex Jelagin

Alex doesn't say much. He just likes to hit stuff with sticks.



### Chris Bistline

This Viking-in-training has yet to make a name for himself, so the others call him "Stinky".



### Justin Slabbert

Justin was turned to clay by a warlock's spell. The crew has stapled him to the mast for good luck.



### Michael James

He's all on fire with eight-bit fury.



### Ryan Kalis

That's not really blood, it's just grenadine and corn syrup.



### Tarryn van der Byl

This Valkyrie-for-hire signed up mostly for the sightseeing and pretty Asian men.



GUITAR HERO III [360]



NAG	<b>90</b>
METACRITIC	<b>85</b>
GAMERANKINGS	<b>86</b>

THE ORANGE BOX [360]



NAG	<b>95</b>
METACRITIC	<b>96</b>
GAMERANKINGS	<b>96</b>

THE SIMS 2 CASTAWAY [PS2]



NAG	<b>77</b>
METACRITIC	<b>71</b>
GAMERANKINGS	<b>72</b>

## mmm... SHINY!

A quick guide to the NAG reviews section



**PC SPEC:** Will this game rape your machine, or make it fly? Check the box at the bottom right for an explanation on our fancy hardware rating system.

**BETTER THAN/WORSE THAN:** Everything is relative, right? Because of that, we keep making comparisons between games in this space, and try to be funny about it.

**SCORE:** You only care about this number, we know that. But try to pretend you read the reviews because they're so insightful and informative. Thank you, we love you.

**VITAL INFO:** A game can't survive without these vitals, so you should probably pay attention to them.

**PLATFORMS:** The brightest block is the platform on which the game was reviewed. Dimmer blocks are platforms on which the game also appears. Simple.

**AWARDS:** You won't find these NAG awards given to games of merit, anywhere but in NAG. Truth.

**GAME NAME:** This is the important bit, and you might want to write it down somewhere just in case you need it later.

**BOTTOM LINE:** It all comes down to this, and the words written here will shape the future, moulding it towards gaming excellence.

**ICONS:** Check the list on the right for our frikkin' sweet icons, distilling the essence of games even further, just for you.

## DISTRIBUTOR LIST

For your convenience, the numbers of the distribution companies

Aleet Distribution	[011] 888-8916	Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
Apex Interactive	[012] 347-9956	Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Asbis	[011] 848-7000	Megarom	[011] 361-4800
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450	Microsoft	[011] 265-3000
Axiz	[011] 237-7000	MiDigital	[011] 723-1800
Comstar	[011] 314-5812	MobileG	084 245 5400
Comztek	0860 600-557	Nology	[012] 657-1317
Corex	[011] 238-2315	Nu Metro	[011] 280-0600
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640	Pinnacle	[011] 265-3000
Creative	[011] 849-2021	Proton Technology	[011] 466-8888
Devon	[041] 365-0258	Rectron	[011] 203-1000
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300	Sahara	[011] 542-1000
Esquire	0861 70 0000	Sapphire ATI	[044] 384-0225
Eurobyte	[011] 234-0142	Sonic Informed	[011] 805-3800
Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300	Ster Kinekor Games	[011] 445-7960
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038	Syntech	086 127 4244
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530	The Outer Limits	[011] 482-3771
Legend Memory	[011] 314-0817	WWE	[011] 462-0150

If your company isn't listed here, phone NAG on [011] 704-2679

## THE REVIEW ICONS

The NAG review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like, while giving us less work to do in the review. Everyone wins, so best memorise this list below and look out for them in the Review score box.



**ACTION:** When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.



**BABYSITTING:** Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.



**BITCHIN':** When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'.



**BORING:** Grab your blankie and teddy, we might be in for some Boring to put you to sleep.



**BUGGY:** Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap.



**CASH-IN/LICENSE:** Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.



**CINEMATIC:** Sweet-ass cut-scenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.



**CLONE:** We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.



**COMPETITIVE:** You don't think Ranked Match is a feature; you think it should be mandatory.



**FOREIGN:** No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? Careful, it might be Foreign!



**ONLINE:** For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.



**PARTY:** Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.



**PIECE OF POO:** Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just can't squeeze a diamond out of a turd.



**STUPID PEOPLE:** Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand like a friend.



**ALL AGES:** These games contain no violence, immoral acts or anything that might narrow the demographic, but they may still be difficult.



**KID FRIENDLY:** Kids can play this game without needing an adult every five minutes to explain to them what button to press.



**16+ RESTRICTION:** If you're 16 or over, you are well within your rights to play this game.



**18+ RESTRICTION:** If you are not yet 18, please put down this game and back away slowly before the police come and arrest you.



**MULTIPLAYER:** The number on the controller icon indicates the maximum number of people who can play at at the same time.

## WILL IT RUN? - PC GAME SPECS

PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

**5** Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment. **[DX10 graphics card; dual-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]**

**4** Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game. **[256MB graphics card with DX9; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]**

**3** Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least Direct X8 support, while your 2GHz Pentium 4 churns happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade. **[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]**

**2** Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit. **[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM]**

**1** You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee first thing in the morning always beats playing games. **[Can run XP, will play game]**



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- > Chipset: NVIDIA GeForce 7150
- > FSB: Support FSB 800/1066/1333MHz
- > MEMORY: DDR2 800 MHz, 2 x DDR2 DIMM Slot Max. Up to 4GB Memory
- > INTEGRATED VIDEO: NVIDIA GeForce 7150 GPU, Memory Share Up to 512MB (Under OS By Turbo Cache), GPU Frequency @600MHz+
- > Micro ATX Form Factor Dimension



## TF 7100P-M7

- > Socket LGA 775
- > Supports Intel Core 2 Extreme/Core 2 Quad/Core 2 Duo/Pentium D/Pentium 4/Celeron 400 Series/Celeron D Processor
- > Supports FSB 800/1066/1333MHz
- > Chipset: NVIDIA GeForce 7100
- > MEMORY: DDR2 800 MHz, 2 x DDR2 DIMM Memory Slot Max. Up to 4GB Memory
- > INTEGRATED VIDEO: NVIDIA GeForce 7100P GPU, Max. Memory Share Up to 512MB(Under OS By Turbo Cache), GPU Frequency @600MHz
- > Micro ATX Form Factor



## GeForce 7050V-M7

- > Socket LGA 775:
- > Chipset: NVIDIA GeForce7050 / NForce610i Single Chip
- > Supports Intel Core 2 Extreme/Core 2 Quad/Core 2 Duo/Pentium D/Pentium 4/Celeron 400 Series/Celeron D Processor
- > Supports FSB 800/1066/1333\*\*MHz
- > Support DDR2 667/800\*\*MHz, 2 x DDR2 DIMM Memory Slot
- > Max. Supports up to 4GB Memory
- > NVIDIA GeForce 7050 GPU, On Board Graphic Max. Memory Share Up to 512MB (Under OS By Turbo Cache), GPU Frequency @500MHz

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# CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE (PC)

**A** DISAFFECTIONED ULTRANATIONALIST NAMED AIMRAN Zakhaev, intent on returning Mother Russia to its former Soviet glory, is stockpiling paramilitaries, nuclear weapons, and malcontent out in the Russian and Azerbaijani backwoods. Anxious to keep prying eyes away from his interesting new hobby, he and his Middle Eastern penpal, Khaled Al-Asad, fund a coup d'état in an unnamed country that bears a rather remarkable resemblance to Iraq. Chaos erupts, and the USMC and SAS are called in to make nice – with extreme prejudice.

The fourth excursion for the intrepid *Call of Duty* corps sees the action airlifted out of its well-trodden WWII battlegrounds and redeployed in an all-new contemporary arena. Say hello to modern conveniences like night vision goggles, laser sights, anti-tank guided missiles, and the big, bad AC-130 Spectre Gunship. Another notable departure from the regular *CoD* fare is that, instead of the usual three separate campaigns, the various stories unfold as one, rather like scenes in a film. The bulk of the game is told from the alternating perspectives of USMC

1<sup>st</sup> Force Recon Sergeant Paul Jackson and SAS 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Sergeant John "Soap" MacTavish, while one lengthy sequence grants the player control of the indomitable Captain Price in a flashback black-ops assassination mission in the Ukraine.

Visually, *Call of Duty 4* is absolutely astonishing even on a modest setup, and virtually photo-realistic on the recommended specs. Just like their real life counterparts, a sniper in a ghillie suit is actually quite hard to spot – which is really sort of the point, isn't it? With fully motion-captured animation,





character movement is almost unsettlingly lifelike, while the particle system, dynamic lighting and depth-of-field effects bear triumphant testament to the abundance of life left in DX9 technology.

Infinity Ward has taken everything in the genre that works, discarded everything that doesn't, and turned out what is probably the finest action shooter ever made. Our only gripe is that, with the single player campaign clocking in around just six hours, it's over all too quickly. **NAG**

Tarryn "Dogmeat" van der Byl



#### BOTTOM LINE

Alpha-Whiskey-Echo-Sierra-Oscar-Mike-Echo, over.

**96**  
OUT OF 100



## MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

To keep the war-like stuff in *Call of Duty 4* "on the level", Infinity Ward got two retired (and decorated) US Army veterans in on the development of the game.

Hank Keirsey is a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army with twenty-four years of service and has been with Activision for three years, consulting on each of the *Call of Duty* titles. He has a bachelor's degree from West Point and a Master's Degree in history from Duke (a private research university located in Durham NC, USA). The United States Military Academy (also known as USMA, West Point or, for collegiate athletic purposes, Army) is a United States Army post and service academy. He taught military history at the Military Academy and is a combat veteran of the first Gulf War. Last May, Keirsey returned from contract work in Iraq. He has seen and trained over 1,000 infantry platoons and trained West Point cadets in tactics and leadership for five years.

John Hillen is a retired US Army Captain with twelve years of service in the Army and has been with Activision for three years as well, consulting with Hank on each of the *Call of Duty* titles. He served in combat in the first Gulf War as a cavalry officer and also served with airborne and special operations the world over. He has a Master's Degree in war Studies from King's College London and a PhD from Oxford. He's written several books and hundreds of articles on military affairs and military history. He reviews books for the *New York Post* and is an on-air commentator for ABC News.



**Lt. Colonel Hank Keirsey (Ret.)**

## SIR, POPPING THE CORN, SIR!

*Call of Duty 4* has an opening caper. We shan't spoil it by revealing any details, but the point is – it totally has an opening caper. And as the deck lists alarmingly beneath your feet, torrents of rain scraping needles across a vision of hydrophobic horror while your comlink spits panic and urgency, you realise that every game that has previously claimed cinematic verve was naught but a lying tyrant upon *Call of Duty*'s rightful throne.

The game makes prodigious use of triggers, scripted sequences, and set pieces to further the action, although elegantly and unobtrusively so. Alongside a compelling narrative with moments of daring, pathos, and big explosions in all the right places, the single-player campaign feels like one of those bloated budget Jerry Bruckheimer extravaganzas. A helicopter goes down amidst the fire-bombed warrens of a dusty Third World metropolis? Now where have we seen that one before?



## THE CALLS OF DUTIES

With the exception of *Modern Warfare*, the *Call of Duty* series is set in World War II and began on the PC, later expanding to consoles and handhelds. The series includes offshoot games that follow the same gameplay dynamics. In all of the games, a large majority of the generic allied troops have the names of the developers and technicians who worked on the game.

*Call of Duty* (PC, Mac)  
*Call of Duty: United Offensive* (PC, Mac)  
*Call of Duty: Finest Hour* (GC, PS2, Xbox)  
*Call of Duty 2* (PC, Mac, 360)  
*Call of Duty 2: Big Red One* (GC, PS2, Xbox)  
*Call of Duty 3* (PS2, PS3, Wii, Xbox, 360)  
*Call of Duty: Roads to Victory* (PSP)  
*Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (PC, 360, PS3)



## CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE (360, PS3)

**I DON'T KNOW WHY** I do it. It's a compulsion. A strange tradition. Downright masochism. Anything else I gladly play on the easy or normal difficulties. I don't believe a game has to torture you to get the most benefit out of it. If you are one of those individuals who need to play a game at its most difficult, power to you. But I prefer to just have fun. Sometimes I even cheat. In *SimCity* I knew the trick to get more cash quickly. Seriously, why get caught up with the business of making a profit when I could just be building urban sprawls? Granted, highly inefficient urban sprawls, but they were my inefficient urban sprawls.

But somehow the universe instructed me that the only way to play *Call of Duty* is at the bleeding edge of the Veteran difficulty. Perhaps that has to do with the game's design. In *CoD* you don't fight more and more dangerous enemies. The soldiers you face in the beginning are the same type that you meet at the end – more or less. There are rarely 'boss fights' and you don't suddenly run into a cyborg-soldier armed with hand-mounted rail guns. Instead, it's you versus many normal foes armed with normal (but incredibly lethal) weapons. The catch is that you can die very quickly. In most shooters, if you are good, you can strafe around a big target and pummel it with all you've got. In *CoD*, if you are good, you can shoot three guys from behind cover before rushing away from the incoming hail of bullets and grenades. It's a whole new experience. To call *Call of Duty* a war game seems wrong. *Medal of Honor*, *Brothers in Arms*, even *World in Conflict*... war games. *Call of Duty* is *Call of Duty*. It's not a theme, it's a system. A gaming institution. There is nothing like it.

This can go to some lengths explaining why fans didn't like *Call of Duty 3*. It was good, no doubt there, but it was *Call of Duty*

2 with some new paint and shrubbery. The art of a new *CoD* game is one of subtlety. The changes are small, almost invisible. When watching *CoD4*, the first obvious criticism is that it looks a bit like the previous games. Even though it is awesome visually, the game's legacy is still very clear. It doesn't represent the jump you'll see between *Unreal Tournament III* and its predecessor. The second criticism is that it still plays a lot like *CoD*. Let's put that better: it lacks stuff like leaning around corners or taking cover. It's the classic 'pop out on the side' system, with no luxury of taking a quick peek. You still frantically run from cover to cover, dodging to try and hit a few heads. Finally, no co-op, which I will admit feels a bit eerie, even if this has never been a feature in *Call of Duty*.

Perhaps all of these things are actually lacking. Perhaps we'll see them in *CoD5*. There are a few reasons I can suggest why *CoD* doesn't need them yet. For one, a cover system sounds great, but it would cut down on the frantic environment staged in the level. Things just won't be that exciting. Sure, *Gears of War* and *Rainbow Six* rocked your nerves, but *CoD* chews on them like bilting.

But if you look at *CoD4* for your wants, not your needs, you miss the point. Take it for what it is, though, and this is arguably – again – the best action game on the market. It's common knowledge that the series moved to modern warfare, incorporating a story of a fictional war involving Russian nationalists and right-wing Middle Eastern forces. *CoD4* follows the more cohesive plot strings that the third game established, instead of reliving critical moments of history in past wars. Following the exploits of British SAS and US infantry, you will raid a cargo ship, drop into a town-turned-warzone, sneak across enemy



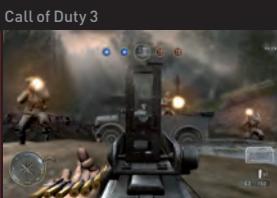
### PS3 VS. 360

The console review covers both platforms, because there is no real difference between them. PS3 owners should definitely buy *CoD4*, because nothing like it has been released for the platform recently. If only all multi-platform games could be like this.

territory and even take charge of powerful military hardware. It's really a very familiar package, but presented in a new way.

As mentioned, *CoD*'s true magic is in its subtle touches – and there are plenty of those. If you find the campaign to be too short, up the difficulty – Veteran mode is probably the hardest the series has ever been. *Call of Duty 4* is the jewel in the series' crown. Unless you really don't like first-person shooters, get it now. **NAG**

James Francis



»»»  
BETTER THAN



»»»  
FOR FANS OF

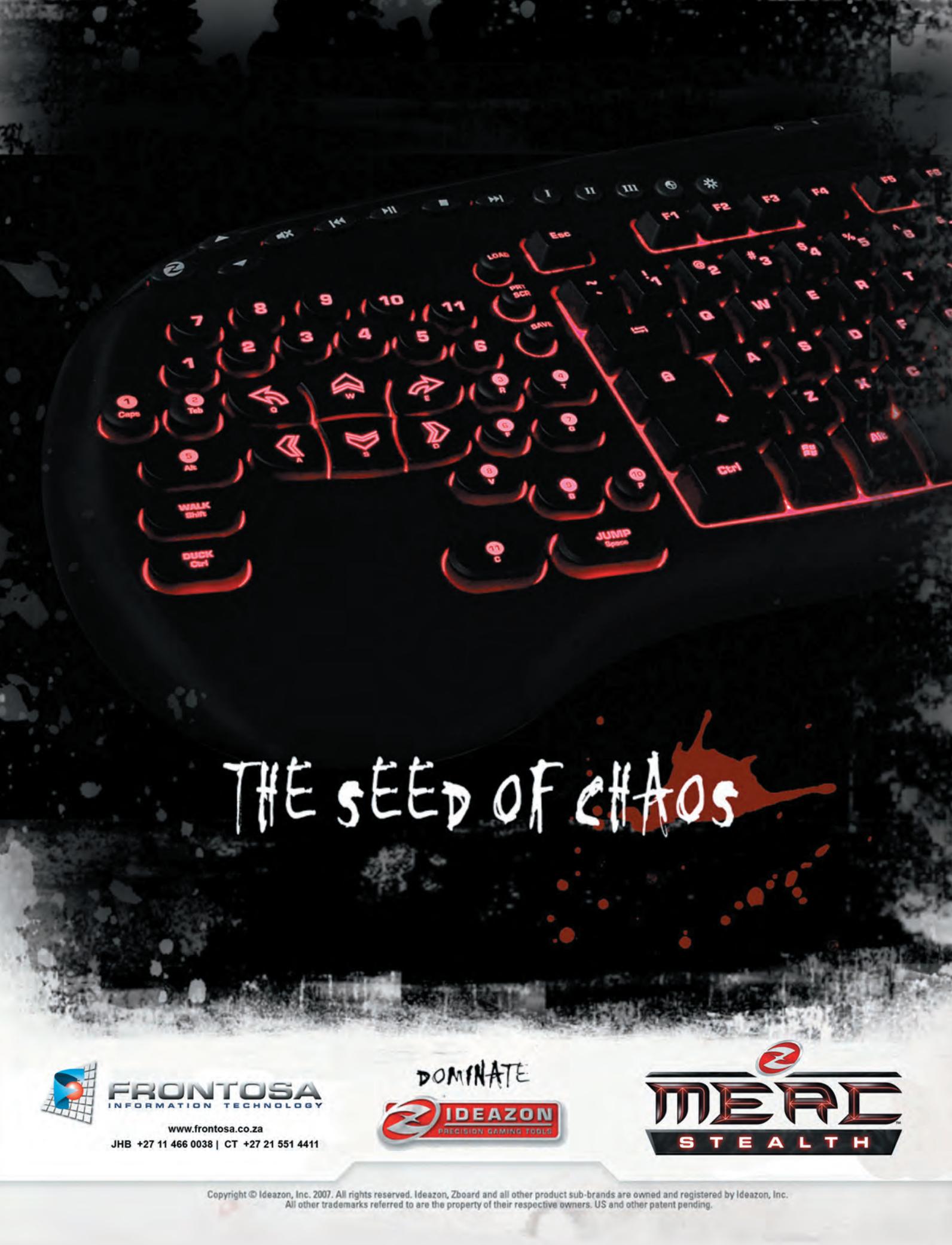


### BOTTOM LINE

The best in the series

**95**  
OUT OF 100





THE SEED OF CHAOS.



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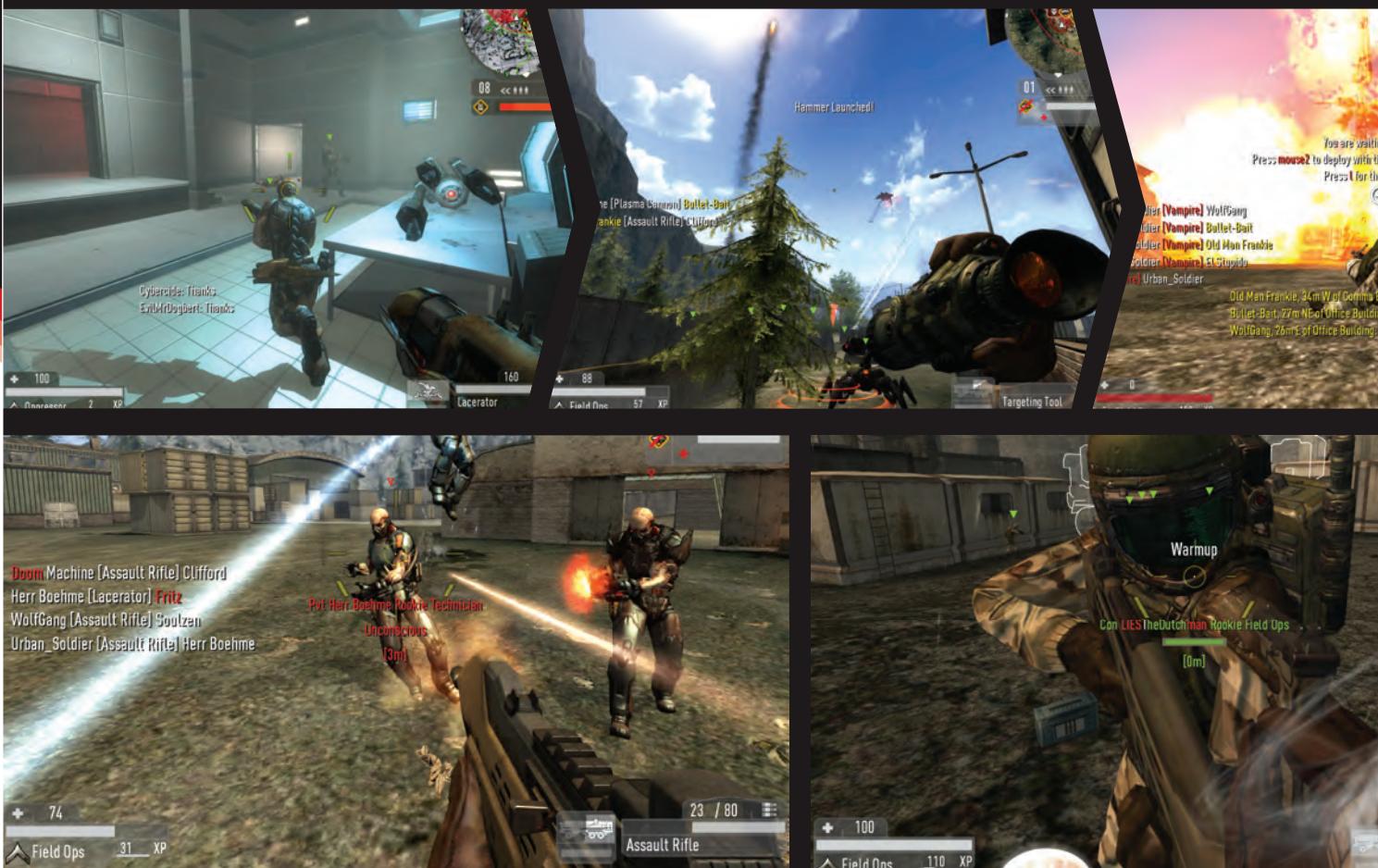
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## ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

THE STROGG ARE HERE! THEY ARE A FEARFUL CREATURES FOR THEY SEE EVERYTHING AND THEY COMPREHEND NOTICES THE AIGLE INSTRUMENTS AT THE SITE. BREAKS IS THE STROGG CLASS THE STROGG SPECIALISTS WILL SERVE OUR SIDE AND STROGG WELL

THIS GAME HAS A more convoluted background than usual. Technically, *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* is the sequel to *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* (released in 2003), but has nothing to do with Germans or World War II. It's also the prequel to *Quake II*, and is the second multiplayer-only Quake game since *Quake III*. Remember the Strogg? They're back! Well, actually this game is set before the events of *Quake II*, so they're technically back. However, according to the timeline they still have to arrive... Not that any of this 'story' matters much because it's only there to give a little purpose to killing aliens and the subsequent and inevitable saving of humanity. The game dynamic is still based on *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, but instead of the Allies and Axis, we now have the Strogg and the GDF (Global Defense Force) battling for various map-based objectives. However, that's not all... *Quake Wars* also features vehicles, much more diversity and complexity, bigger maps and, unlike the first game, two very different sides. Fans of *Wolfenstein* will be happy to note that the same developer, Splash Damage, has developed both games. Some say that *Quake Wars* is just like the *Battlefield* series and some say it's a little

like *Unreal Tournament* (a combination of the Assault and Onslaught game modes). The good and bad news are that both camps are right and wrong. Phew.

If the introduction hasn't set the scene for you, then you must be a newcomer to this particular game genre or you're a *Battlefield* player or part of a group called everyone else. Regardless, here's a quick field guide...

*Quake Wars* is a class-based, futuristic, massively multiplayer online first-person shooter with aliens and humans going at each other, tooth and suction pad. Up to 24 players can play in the game at the same time, choosing between two asymmetric sides (humans and Strogg). Once a side is selected, a class must be chosen from a selection of five, including medic, engineer or soldier. Each class has access to suitably different weapons and equipment. For example, the medic carries defibrillation paddles to revive fallen team mates and the engineer can build defensive turrets or repair damaged equipment. Some of these classes are essential to completing the mission objectives, which is one way of ensuring there's an even spread of 'talent' on the battlefield at any given time. The classes on both sides are similar, but have some small





differences. For example, the Strogg don't need ammunition, so instead of dropping ammunition packs, the Strogg can drop a tactical shield. Therefore, besides the obvious cosmetic differences there is enough variation to keep things interesting.

Once the game kicks off, one side must defend a specific objective while the other side attacks the same objective. These objectives usually favour either taking over Earth or defending it, which brings the story bit into play and gives some common purpose to the whole exercise. Depending on how well everyone plays together, one side will win and the other will lose. As the game progresses, awards, points and abilities are unlocked and players will receive certain upgrades based on their performance and which class they decided to play as (an extra clip of ammunition anyone?). This is the game in a nutshell. More broadly, there are three different multiplayer games on offer: a single map; a whole continent (three maps in a row); or a duel where one team tries to beat the other team's time to complete the same objectives. Thankfully, there's also a single-player game in there, against computer-controlled opponents. The good news is that it's better than competent. Considering the team-based dynamic, the artificial intelligence does a cracking good job at killing you and completing objectives. For the glory hounds, there is an option to toggle whether your computer-controlled team mates can complete objectives or not.

Out of the box, the game has a few niggling issues such as no voice chat for fire teams and some tiresome key binding issues, but the first patch is already out addressing most of these issues as well as over 80 other specific

problems. This is a quick turnaround for a first patch, so well done to the development team. There's no doubt many more will follow eventually turning *Quake Wars* into something resembling the perfect game for people who enjoy playing it.

The graphics also deserve a mention but mostly thanks to its lack of lustre. It's not an ugly game... it's just unremarkable, especially when compared to the ultra-slickness of the *Unreal Engine 3 (Unreal Tournament III)* and the incredibly detailed and diverse *CryENGINE2 (Crysis)*. In terms of art direction, *Quake Wars* just gets the job done and this is most apparent when looking at the boringly functional and bland indoor areas. Outside is a little better in terms of large expansive environments, but when examined a little closer, nothing stands out or is too much different from everything else. That said, the game engine moves things around quickly enough and has more than enough features you can tweak to get it looking and running just the way you like it, even on a midrange machine. The characters and vehicles are a little better, but the overall impression of the animation and 'feel' is a little off. Honestly, all of this sounds much harsher than it really is because *Quake Wars* really is more about how the game plays and not how it looks. Therefore, the visual dynamics don't add or subtract too much from the overall equation. If you've never tried anything like this before, then this is a good place to start because it's the most-advanced game of its type to date.

#### FITTING IN

In *Quake Wars*, one team defends and one attacks with each map divided into primary objectives involving some construction,

defending or destroying. This effectively focuses the battle in specific areas, because once you've lost an objective, and unlike flag capping in *Battlefield*, there's no getting it back; so it's do or die until the end of the round. Players who enjoy a lone wolf style of play won't find much satisfaction playing *Quake Wars* - there's no good reason to sneak around the map and cause problems for the other side. In *Battlefield*, you can jump into a jeep, drive to the other side of the map, and make a difference to how the battle ebbs and flows. Again, all of this is personal preference because as much as there are plenty of players who like the lone soldier approach, there is an equal amount who enjoy teaming up and conquering objectives together. Regardless of your background, it's clear that most gamers are trying to like *Quake Wars*. Some think they should like it and others will like it some of the time, but not all the time. *Quake Wars* is just one of those games that you're going to love, hate or force yourself to find some middle ground you can live with. Whether or not it's going to replace *Battlefield 2* or *2142* is really going to come down to personal preference and no review is going to tell you if you should like it or not. This is something you're going to have to find out for yourself. But please, when you do start playing, give it a fair chance because initial impressions for fans of the genre won't be good, but the game tends to grow on you the more you play it.

**NAG**

**Michael James**

Anything that has Quake on the box

FOR FANS OF



WORSE THAN



THE Battlefield series

16+

**BOTTOM LINE**

Solid and plenty of fun, but lacking that special 'something' that makes the *Battlefield* series so compelling.

**79**  
OUT OF 100







## UNLEASH THE ROCK

Guitar Hero III introduces the three-quarter scale Les Paul controller, succeeding GHII's spiffy oh-so-80s white Xplorer with great daring and inimitable style. The controller has been entirely redesigned, and now features not only a bold new shape, but a significantly improved playing experience. The low profile fret buttons offer a slightly softer tactile response, while the clickity-clackity-snappity-break of the Xplorer's strum bar has been swapped for something that feels a lot more expensive. And now with the myriad marvels of wireless technology, you can rock right around the clock (and beyond) without any of those dreadfully embarrassing breakaway incidents.

It's worth noting, however, that by dint of some inscrutable devil science, the gyro in the new controller is more over-sensitive than a squadron of emo brats. For approximately nine out of every ten people, this isn't likely to pose any potential problem, but if you're one of those very lucky Super Awesome Elite™ people who use their left hands to do stuff, you might find yourself inadvertently deploying Star Power if you tilt the controller two degrees past horizontal. First scissors and a marginally increased incidence of psychotic mental illness, now this. It's little wonder we die young.

# GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK

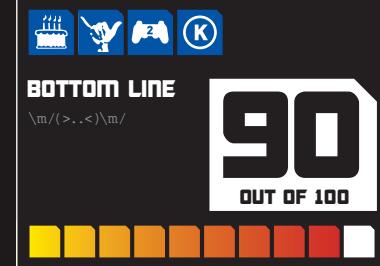
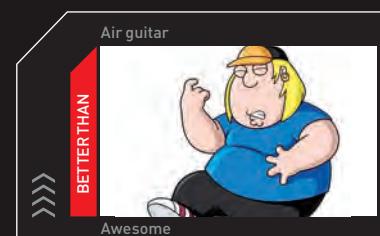
Before we return to our regularly scheduled reviews, here is a public service announcement. *Guitar Hero* is not a guitar simulator – it's a game. Kindly take any ignorant, ill-considered "why don't u lurn a real instramint lol" tommyrot somewhere else. Thank you.

**G**UITAR HERO IS BACK, now with more Roman numerals, a subtitle, and a whole new roster o' rock. For those of us who have already fallen prey to its titanium claws, there's probably not that much rhetoric needed here (just go buy it already), but for those who have been living – oh, delectable irony! – *under* a rock somewhere, here's the buzz. There's a fretboard on screen, with itty-bitty coloured circles scrolling on it, and when those itty-bitty coloured circles reach the bottom of the screen, you hold the corresponding coloured button

on the controller, hit the strum bar, and jump up and down on the couch. It's the ridiculously simple-in-theory-but-actually-really-quite-hard-to-master sensation that has swept the globe in a flurry of broken furniture bills.

With the exception of the largely forgettable Battle Mode (the novelty of throwing broken fret buttons at your opponent wears off quickly), it's really just more of the same. There are a few somewhat lacklustre song selections in the first three tiers (the interminable dun-da-da-dun tedium of *Barracuda*? Oh, come on.), although this is a criticism which might well come down to personal preference, and there are more than enough tracks clangin the top of the Strike-A-Silly-Pose-O-Meter to make up for this anyway. **NAG**

Tarryn "Fret Wizard" van der Byl



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# TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

**T**o call *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* a cash-in would be unfair: the motivation behind developing the game is (apparently) pure. Instead, let's call it a tribute; a tribute to the best known and most widely recognised game character of all time.

The best thing that could have happened to the *Tomb Raider* series was Crystal Dynamics getting into the developer's seat. The original developers, Core, had done a good job for many years, but the steady decline in quality that the *Tomb Raider* titles suffered from came to a head in the dreadful *Angel of Darkness* - a game that was slated universally. Enter Crystal Dynamics, and the next Lara Croft adventure to hit the shelves, *Legend*. This title revamped so much of what had been done before, making the experience far more enjoyable to gamers the world over. Lara looked better and moved better. Overall, it was a massive improvement.

And so, *Anniversary* came along. The premise behind developing this game seems honest enough. As a celebration of more than ten years of *Tomb Raider*, Crystal Dynamics developed a game inspired by the very first *Tomb Raider* title. Fair enough. With the huge leaps and bounds made in terms of technology since the 1996 release of the first game, it made sense. The improvements made to the game by Crystal Dynamics also

add a healthy dose of justification to this release. However, let's be honest; we want new games with new stories. New ways to experience the game are all fine and well, but only hardcore Lara fans and those who have never played the earlier games will be wowed by *Anniversary*.

Let's take a moment, though, and give credit where it's due. Crystal Dynamics has done a fantastic job with *Anniversary*. The graphics might have been a bit better, but the game just feels right. Lara's movements are fluid and versatile (like those introduced in *Legend*) and the levels are challenging and enjoyable. The story might not be the most original, but ten years is a long time... Players of the original game will enjoy *Anniversary*.

Nevertheless, the game is a stopgap between releases. The title lacks the polish we saw in *Legend*, feeling a little rushed and pushed out. The game just doesn't have that 'special something' that Crystal Dynamics introduced with their first *Tomb Raider* outing, and people who enjoyed *Legend* may be a bit disappointed with *Anniversary*.

So, is it a cash-in? Possibly. One thing is certain though; it doesn't have half of what made *Legend* great and is hopefully just a rough patch rather than an indicator of things to come. It would be sad to see Lara's games spiralling towards another

Angel of Darkness all over. **NAG**  
Walt Pretorius

**Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness**

»»» **BETTER THAN**

Big breasts and nice bums

««« **FOR FANS OF**

**BOTTOM LINE**

It's good, but not as good as it could have been.

**74** OUT OF 100

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- Genuine Windows Vista® Home Premium
- 13.3" WXGA(1280x800), Fine Bright Technology
- ATI Radeon™ Xpress 1250
- 1.3 Mega Pixel Webcam
- HDMI port (Next Generation multimedia interface)



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"Wow. I can't see \$#!7!"



## THE OTHER MGS

The first title in the series, *Syphon Filter*, was released in 1999 to a range of reactions including being labelled a "poor man's *Metal Gear Solid*." This did nothing to stop it reaching 19th place on IGN's "Top 25 Games of All Time."

Since then, the series has had a number of successful sequels including the PSP version of *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror*, developed by Sony Bend and published by SCEA. This was followed a year later by *Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow*, which was released in October 2007.

The PS2 port was also scheduled for release a year after the original PSP version. The difference between the two, however, was that the PS2 version was heavily censored; something which none of the previous versions ever were. The censoring included the removal of partial nudity as well as all blood, while some weapons, like the taser, which would set enemies on fire if used for too long, were also completely abandoned.

# SYPHON FILTER: DARK MIRROR

**T**HE *SYPHON FILTER* SERIES, despite playing a second fiddle to the likes of the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise, has long enjoyed a substantial fan base, owing to the clever balance it struck between no-brains-required, run-and-gun action and stealth-orientated combat. The series' latest PS2 title, *Dark Mirror*, ported from the PSP title of the same name, remains true to this formula, despite having a few rough edges. 2006's PSP game was widely regarded as one of the best games released for Sony's portable platform, undoubtedly leaving fans with high expectations for the PS2 version of the game. It should be noted that the PS2 version is a near-exact replica of the single-player campaign found in the PSP title, with some very subtle changes to the play dynamic and control scheme, as well as some toning down of some of the more controversial dialogue segments and visuals.

What remains is still an enjoyable, if somewhat short-lived experience, with the single-player campaign offering around ten hours of play. Nonetheless, those ten hours are action filled and entertaining, as you reprise the role of Agent Gabe Logan on yet another quest to save the world from a clandestine terrorist organisation. Several of the missions also feature cooperative segments with computer-controlled NPCs, including among them Lian Xing and other familiar faces, as well as some more generic characters.

The missions offer objectives that are both numerous and varied, though much of the game still involves simple running around while killing anything that moves; and to that end, the control scheme is functional and intuitive, benefiting from two analogue sticks (compared to the PSP's one). The cover mechanism also works well, allowing you to hide behind a myriad of environmental objects whilst picking off foes. Hand-to-hand combat and stealth kills using knives and the Tazer are also included (though it's no longer possible to make your enemies combust using the stun gun).

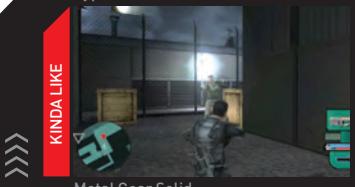
The visuals, though not outstanding, are more than adequate, and have survived the transition from the portable platform's small LCD screen quite well (though they do look somewhat blurry in spots). The audio is unremarkable aside from the particularly cheesy voice acting, which is as much a fault of the scriptwriters as the actors themselves.

*Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror*, though certainly not in any way revolutionary, is an enjoyable action romp while it lasts. It's easy to play and engaging, despite the corny story line and unremarkable graphics. Of course, much of the PSP version's success was attributable to its multiplayer component, and the PS2 version's single-player campaign does feel somewhat limited, offering little in the way of replay value. Nonetheless, it's not a bad game

by any means, and should satisfy the cravings of most PS2 action game fans. **NAG**

**Adam Liebman**

**Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror (PSP)**



»»» **KINDA LIKE**

**Metal Gear Solid**



»»» **WORSE THAN**

**71**  
**OUT OF 100**



**BOTTOM LINE**

Fun, if short-lived, and true to the *Syphon Filter* series.










★★★

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# THE ORANGE BOX

**VALVE'S VENTURES ONTO CONSOLES**, in the past, have been luke-warm at best. The studio certainly knew its way around PCs, but it had to make the hard transition of including the growing and demanding console shooter market. Quite a lot of the former PC greats have either not gotten this right or abandoned PC-orientated games altogether. At the very least, one could expect such a change to dilute what the developer had done so far.

But you can hardly ignore consoles these days, especially when *The Orange Box* represents a great chance to introduce the *Half-Life* games to a new audience. It also means that PC gamers who have moved to the couch and controller won't miss out on the series. Instead of farming the work out, Valve has opted to make the Source engine compatible with the major consoles. The result is an *Orange Box* that is exactly like the PC version – in other words, excellent.

As with the PC version, you get *Half-Life 2*, its two episodes, *Portal* and *Team Fortress 2* in one package. Each, even the vintage titles, has achievements, which is a great excuse to replay *Half-Life 2* if you've encountered it already. Instead of just slapping a controller's

interface on the games, a bit of thought went into things. This makes the games very playable for console shooter fans. Vehicle sequences are actually easier and in *Half-Life* the weapons selection has been neatly tied to the d-pad. If you don't like the setup, you can reconfigure the keys, albeit to a limited extent.

While *Half-Life 2* looks a bit dated by now, the rest of the games don't. But the gameplay is solid all-round and include commentary. *Team Fortress 2* plays well online, but the lobby lacks ping indicators to show how much you'll lag on a server. This means you either go in blind or you should try and join a game full of local players.

It's great to see that Valve's games are now as good on console as the standard PCs have set, which means more revenue for the studio and more fans to enjoy its excellent games. With the console versions of *Half-Life* and the original *Half-Life 2* port, things were very shaky. That's now well in the past. So *The Orange Box* is well worth getting. If you consider that you get five games in the deal, this should probably be a compulsory buy. **NAG**

James Francis



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## FOLKLORE

THE QUIET LITTLE IRISH village of Doolin seems, at first glance, to be the sort of place too innocent and peaceful to host any sinister secrets, but as the protagonists of *Folklore* are soon to discover, there is far more to the diminutive town than initially meets the eye. Keats, a brash reporter for an occult magazine, and Ellen, a quiet young woman searching for her long-lost mother, are both drawn to the mysterious town where the living mix with the dead, and soon find themselves amidst a mystery far beyond anything either of them could ever have conceived. This is the story behind *Folklore*, Game Republic's highly anticipated action/RPG hybrid for the PS3, and it looks like they've produced a sure-fire winner.

The game is spread over a number of chapters for both characters, which see the two of them unravelling a mystery in both the eerily serene Doolin, as well as the Netherworld – the realm of the dead that is accessible from the otherwise inconspicuous town. Doolin itself is a rather uninspiring place, though each character has a number of 'quests' that need to be performed there during the day in order to open portals into the Netherworld each night, which is where the majority of the action takes place.

The Netherworld itself comprises a number of different realms, each incredibly atmospheric and visually impressive – from the lush forests of the Faery Realm to an

Undersea City and fiery Hell itself. In each realm, Ellen and Keats have to defeat a number of different monsters known as Folks. What sets *Folklore* apart, however, is that each Folk has an 'Id' – a spirit that is released when a monster is weakened in combat. By holding down the R1 button and performing various movements with the SIXAXIS controller, these Ids can be captured by the protagonists, and then used in combat against other monsters.

Each Id has its own elemental affinity, with some Folks being susceptible only to attacks by certain elements. Scattered throughout the levels are Memory Stones, *Folklore*'s equivalent of treasure chests, some of which can only be opened by specific Ids acquired later in the game (adding a degree of replay value to the title).

The controls are simple and intuitive, with an easily accessible menu allowing you to map any four captured Ids to the SIXAXIS face buttons for use during combat; and you'll undoubtedly want to shuffle them around a bit as you progress through the game, gaining more powerful monsters to do your bidding.

With a compelling and gripping storyline, spectacular visuals and superb voice acting (though much of the story is told in a unique graphic novel style), as well as an addictive play dynamic, *Folklore* is certainly a must-have for PS3 owners. **NAG**

Adam Liebman



### BOTTOM LINE

Beautiful and captivating, a not-to-be-missed action/RPG title.

**90**  
OUT OF 100







# SEGA RALLY

**A**S I CAREENED WILDLY around another yet-to-be-chosen apparently quite unsuitable for the hard-packed sand, it occurred to me that in the interests of perpetuating my own and others' lives, rally driving is a profession I might do better to avoid. But hey, I'll bet those supercilious rally drivers don't know words like 'lugubrious' or 'discombobulation', or even 'supercilious' for that matter. So whatever.

SEGA's latest rally romper has, predictably, seen one of those multi-platform releases that are all the rage these days – but this PSP release isn't a slipshod port of its big brother. Rather, Finnish developer, Bugbear (previously responsible for the acclaimed demolition derby racer, *FlatOut*), redesigned the game entirely for Sony's handheld, an unusual concession which has turned out rather nicely indeed.

SEGA Rally is primarily an arcade racer, so there's no fiddling with tyre pressure or torque or any of that inscrutable rubbish that never really makes any discernible difference to the gameplay other than rendering the pre-race setup a interminable and suicidally tedious affair. There's a modest selection of tyres, but after some trial and error, it turns out that the bog-standard tarmac set is good for pretty much everything. The controls are similarly unfussy – steering, brake, handbrake, and acceleration. You'll be mostly accelerating, mind you, as drift is impressively implemented and an eminently more exhilarating substitute for ABS.

Gameplay modes include the Championship career mode, as well as Quick Race, a somewhat unforgiving Time Attack, and Multiplayer, spanning 15 tracks (30 once you've run them all in reverse).

With an extensive array of unlockable cars on offer, there's plenty of room for replayability for people who're into that sort of thing. These include decal-slathered roadrunners in three classes: Premier, Modified, and Classic. One minor niggle is that no technical specifications are provided for any of the vehicles, but after swapping them out a bit, you'll soon discover that some are, in fact, better (well, faster) than others.

This saucy little racer is also packing some hot visuals. The cars themselves sport highly detailed modelling and texture details, and collect spatters of mud and snow during the course of a race, while the environments feature all sorts of happy clutter, including buildings, spectators, and abundant vegetation. You can even switch between four different view modes without dropping a frame. The audio isn't all that remarkable, although the pacenote announcer's voice lends a certain roguish old-school authenticity to the game.

Of course, as arcade gameplay-oriented as it is, an unavoidable upshot is that the game isn't terribly difficult. While I maintained a rather wretched – I'm consistent, if nothing else – third place throughout most of the championship series, it's quite likely that a better player (i.e. everyone else) would place

second or first without breaking anything in frustration. The load times are also a little ponderous, sometimes spinning out in excess of 30 seconds. **NAG**

**Tarryn "OFF-ROAD RAAAAMPAGE" van der Byl**



## BOTTOM LINE

A pedestrian murder option, and this would be an 80. Easily.

**75**  
OUT OF 100



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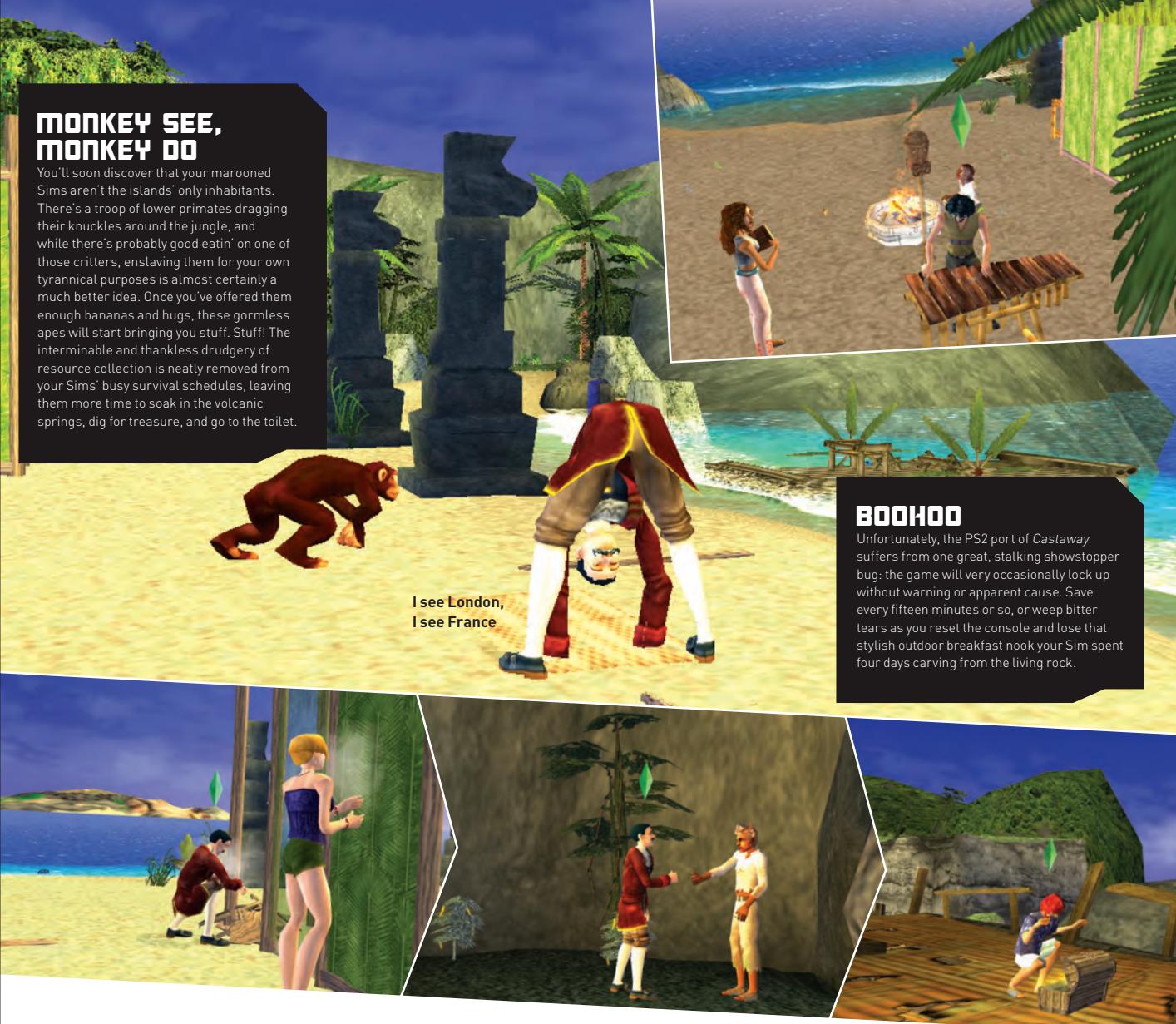
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## THE SIMS 2 CASTAWAY

Dear Sand Buddy,

Oh, what foul chance and unhappy destiny has befallen me! Fortune, spiteful harridan that she is, has unfurled her leathery wings and gleefully emptied her bladder upon the heads of myself and my companions. Our yacht was scuppered, our hapless bodies flung overboard into the treacherous embrace of storm-whipped seas. I have washed ashore on this beach, sadly parted from my erstwhile crewmates, and cast into uncertainty. What horror must await my wretched soul! But in the meantime, I have brought you these nice coconuts.

With affection,  
T.

**WILL WRIGHT'S SIMS FACTORY**, the smoke of industry a perpetual pall over its crenellated battlements, has cranked open its portcullis once again, and marched out yet another iteration of its monstrously successful franchise. Only this time around, instead of the suburban humdrum of job seeking, childcare, and turning dead family members into zombies, your Sims are cast out into an untamed wilderness, and must

fend for themselves against such ghastly terrors as bad weather and parrots.

While *Castaway* shares superficial similarities with its predecessors, the core gameplay is significantly different. Taking control of a single Sim at a time, players must explore their surroundings, gather provisions, and basically play Robinson Crusoe-Robinson Crusoe. Your immediate concern, for example, is to find stuff to shove in your Sim's face hole, so best get raiding those palm trees. As you accomplish certain tasks, you're rewarded with blueprints for all sorts of nifty things, from fishing spears and primitive stone axes to shower cubicles and deluxe island bungalows with all the trimmings.

There are three islands to explore, plunder, and infest with smallpox at your leisure, while there's an over-arching objective to find all the bits of wires, transistors, and other gear that will ultimately net your Sims a ride back to civilisation. It's all oodles of pineapple-flavoured fun, and before you know it, you'll have lost 15 hours of your life harvesting bamboo and clams. **NAG**

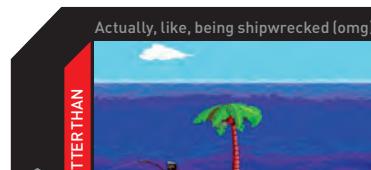
**Tarryn "Get your cannibal holocaust on" van der Byl**

### MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO

You'll soon discover that your marooned Sims aren't the islands' only inhabitants. There's a troop of lower primates dragging their knuckles around the jungle, and while there's probably good eatin' on one of those critters, enslaving them for your own tyrannical purposes is almost certainly a much better idea. Once you've offered them enough bananas and hugs, these gormless apes will start bringing you stuff. Stuff! The interminable and thankless drudgery of resource collection is neatly removed from your Sims' busy survival schedules, leaving them more time to soak in the volcanic springs, dig for treasure, and go to the toilet.

### BOO HOO

Unfortunately, the PS2 port of *Castaway* suffers from one great, stalking showstopper bug: the game will very occasionally lock up without warning or apparent cause. Save every fifteen minutes or so, or weep bitter tears as you reset the console and lose that stylish outdoor breakfast nook your Sim spent four days carving from the living rock.



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## MOTOGP 07

**WHY DOESN'T A MOTORBIKE** have a roof light? Well, because it doesn't have a door to switch it on. And why are there no decent bike games out there? Well, probably because you haven't gotten your sticky fingers on *MotoGP 07*. It's good, it's new, and it's for those who feel that *Forza* offered twice the rubber surfaces needed to have fun on petrol-guzzling mean machines. Have you played a *MotoGP* game? Any of them? Well, then it's time to start. Your levels of disappointment will be kept low as you lean and scream from corner to corner into gravel trap. As with the games that came before it, you get to customise your own rider. Tweak him into the perfect speed demon, designed and trained to win. And remember, attributes are not the end all and be all. Sporting funky colours on your bike's body and your helmet will help distinguish you from the other online plebs trying to catch more than just a face full of tar. How customisable? Well, less than *Forza* but more than most. Okay, so you have your rider, dolled up and pretty, now get your bike. Of course, you won't get the biggest and the best right off the bat. No, you need

to finish a MotoGP season first. But the good news is that as from now, your season will be brought to you in glorious next-gen, or as close as they get these days. What does this mean to you, the unassuming champion to be? Well, only the best-looking blurs that speed can offer. To appreciate scenery more, feel free to fall and/or crash. Just remember, your sponsor doesn't pay you to observe, but to race. And race you will. For variation, an Extreme mode has been added. You take a production bike, do the prettiness thing, and then race on some extreme track out in the country, including some of South Africa's best scenery. *MotoGP 07* also features a fairly decent soundtrack. The only question remaining is whether riding a bike is as much fun as driving a car - digitally speaking of course. Well, you get over the differences. Maybe try rookie first, get used to it, feel the bike, be one with the chromed stallion. Scream when the motion blur is so amazing that you miss your turn. We're sure you'll agree; riding a bike is somewhat tricky, but so sexy. **NAG**

Eddie Francis

In the future, these turn into robots

**Bikes in Test Drive Unlimited**

»»» **BETTER THAN** MotoGP, the real thing

««« **FOR FANS OF** Forza

**BOTTOM LINE** Look! A two-wheeled Forza.

**80** OUT OF 100



# HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V: TRIBES OF THE EAST

**T**HE *MIGHT AND MAGIC* franchise has a long and storied history, dating back about two decades. The *Heroes of Might and Magic* series provides us with an enchanting blend of turn-based strategy and role-playing. For those of you unfamiliar with the series, here is a brief synopsis of how it works. The player controls at least one hero character at the start of a mission. Sometimes, the player also starts with a fledgling city, and sometimes the first settlement must first be captured. The hero can have an army attached, consisting of a limited number of troop types, but essentially unlimited in terms of units per type. Scattered across the map is a variety of places of interest: various mines and other resource nodes; magical sites that confer various bonuses; settlements; and story locations. The hero has a limited movement range (which varies according to skills attained and items carried). Time passes in one-day turns, and certain events occur weekly. The player is presented with a series of objectives at the start of a game, and often these must be carried out in a certain sequence, so there is something of an element of puzzle-solving on a grand scale here.

As well as the strategic overview map, there are tactical encounters. These are individual battles that take place during the course of a game, and can include the capturing of sites or treasures from neutral monsters, sieges to enemy cities, or battles in the field when two opposing heroes and their armies meet. The combat also takes place in a turn-based manner, and the units involved are carried over, so it is not enough to merely win each battle – one must try to

conserve units for later use.

Cities can be upgraded with a variety of facilities, many of which enable the recruitment of various troop types, while others provide resource management functions or other services, including defence. Over the course of a game, it is not uncommon for a player to hire additional heroes. It is typical for two main armies to be fielded; one focused on conquest, while the other one's priority is defence. Other heroes may be hired to carry out menial tasks, such as collecting resources from certain places that need to be visited. During the course of adventuring, heroes earn experience points, which result in level-ups and increases in skills. One skill is assigned automatically, while another can be chosen from a small set of options that the player is presented with. In this manner, the heroes are gradually customised in a manner approaching the player's preferences, but the player is prevented from 'min-maxing' a character's abilities to a specific, 'optimal' template.

Besides a neat, if nowadays somewhat dated, interface and pretty graphics, this game's main appeal lies in its storyline. Characters develop over the course of a campaign, and it is possible to get somewhat attached to them. The voice acting is also quite good, despite the fact that the dialogue itself is sometimes rather cheesy. While this game is playable in multiplayer mode, it truly shines when in Campaign mode. The campaigns span many missions, and each mission can take hours to complete; so this is a game that one can truly sink one's teeth into. On the downside, many will find its

replay value rather limited. This specific title introduces some minor additions to *Heroes of Might and Magic V*, but the main novelty is the continuation of the story. Unlike many 'expansions', this one doesn't require the original game and is a self-contained game in its own right, making it accessible to newcomers to the series. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

Warlords

**WORLDS BATTLECRY II**

BETTER THAN  
HoMM V

AS GOOD AS


**BOTTOM LINE**

A solid romp for lovers of slower-paced games.

**76**  
OUT OF 100





# DRAGON BALL Z: SHIN BUDOKAI 2

**A**S PART OF MY five-year plan to reintroduce the world to big words, I usually like to begin my reviews with one or two paragraphs of discreetly instructional verbiage masquerading as a story setting. Like most games, the events of *Shin Budokai 2* occur within a narrative arc, but one that unfortunately appears to have been conceived and written by someone in the unrelenting grip of a formidable neurological disturbance. After click-click-forwarding my way through a ten-minute introduction, largely consisting of fragmented and seemingly unrelated dialogue sequences, I had only the vaguest idea what the game was all about. Something about Future Trunks, beans, and a big pink guy with pointy ears called Dabura. Consequent narrative intrusions did nothing to dispel this fog of confusion.

The story sequences within the game follow this same general trend, with a haphazard, uncoordinated and mostly quite silly series of tasks to complete, like flying around and, well, flying around. In stark contrast, the fighting bits of the game aren't shabby at all, begging the obvious question, "Why bother with this farcical charade of a plot in the first place?" While there's some attempt at offering a varied game experience with action-dependent plot sequencing, it really serves only to disrupt

the clobbering stuff. For the purposes of this review, therefore, let's simply pretend that the story isn't there.

Much like several other titles in the prolific *Dragon Ball Z* franchise, battles are single-round affairs and depending on opponent strength, you'll have to eat your way through anything up to seven tiers of health stuff to win. There's an encyclopaedic index of combos to rough and tumble through, including all sorts of psychedelic special manoeuvres, which you can unlock during the course of the game. Oh, and in the grand tradition of Japanese gaming, there are collectible Booster cards that you can swap out between stages to amplify abilities.

So, it has all the standard stuff, but what goes some way to making *Shin Budokai 2* a brawler worth looking into is the visuals. Somewhat unusually, this game has chucked vanilla 3D in favour of cell-shaded graphics that give it a sort of sparkly next-gen glitz. It's a daring aesthetic, and an exceedingly classy one at that.

The are 24 playable characters (including all those alternate forms and transformations that only seem to make sense to 12 year olds on Ritalin), while in addition to the Another Road story mode, there's a quick play Arcade Mode, and something dubbed Z Trial, offering its own ladder of modes, including Time Attack,

Survival, and the objective-based Challenge game types. **NAG**

**Tarryn "Button Masher Z" van der Byl**

The show, actually



»»» KINDA LIKE

Japanese nonsense



««« FOR FANS OF

»»» BOTTOM LINE

Potentially decent brawler smothered by a super Saiyan stupid story.

**58**  
OUT OF 100

PC
PS4



# FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008

**O**HNO. *FOOTBALL MANAGER* is back; the game that will cost you sleep, productivity, jobs, girlfriends and wives – and all you want to do is play one more match. Days, months, seasons and years flash by as you plot your club's rise in the football world. Why does someone like Sir Alex Ferguson stick around for 20-odd years at a club he has won every title with? The answer lies in the utterly addictive *FM08*, which accurately imitates the day-to-day dealings of a football coach. Quite simply, when it's in your blood you can't get it out. It becomes a drug – a quest for the perfect team.

*FM08* has certainly come a long way since the first *Championship Manager* titles from developer Sports Interactive 15 years ago. In those days, you had a choice of four leagues. In *FM08*, there are a whopping 114 divisions in 52 countries – all available for your refined selection. In effect, there are thousands of clubs to choose from. If it tickles your fancy, you can manage a side in far-flung places such as Belarus, India or even Hong Kong. South Africa is faithfully represented too, from giants Kaizer Chiefs to minnows Ga-Rankuwa United.

The game has also been boosted with a whole host of options that were absent in the past. You still buy players and set tactics, but now you also have to watch

videos from agents, answer the press, deal with unruly players and manage your finances. Moreover, if you don't keep your bosses and fans happy, you get the sack and all those years of hard work are snuffed out in a second. There is so much to do, in fact, that it can become extremely overwhelming very quickly and, with this in mind, SI has included a welcome in-game tutorial to clear things up.

The list of options borders on the ridiculous and one wonders what *FM20* will feature. Where else can you tell your virtual groundsman to increase the pitch width so that the field will complement your wing play? Nevertheless, it's that kind of detail that sucks you in. You'll find yourself out at lunch, away from the game, doodling tactics on your napkin. And if judging a game's class by how it immerses you in its virtual reality is the thing to do, then one need look no further than *FM08* – the day-to-day strife suffered by managers around the world is only a loading screen away.

The game is pure genius – there's no doubt about it – but there's one issue we just cannot overlook. There's a major bug in gameplay when choosing certain tactics. Well done to SI for releasing a mammoth 30MB patch immediately, but the game should never have been released with such a glaring error. For us, at least, it took off

some of the shine from what would have been a very highly-rated title. **NAG**  
**Ryan Kalis**

Accrington Stanley

BETTER THAN



Your best kind of drug

KINDA LIKE



TOP

PC

PS2

PS3

PSP

XBOX

360

DS

Wii

GBA

MOB

MOB

TOP

70

OUT OF 100



# MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

THE APPARENTLY FLAGGING FORTUNES of the *Medal of Honor* series have been turned around by a new game that thinks it's a good idea to hurl in-game characters out of perfectly functional aircraft with nothing but a bit of silk tied to their backs. Okay, so I am not a great fan of skydiving, but the new delivery method that *Medal of Honor: Airborne* employs in getting troops onto the battlefield is excellent. By dropping into the battle zone, the player can pretty much decide where to start the mission, and just how much trouble he or she lands him or herself in – if you'll excuse the pun.

Because of this delivery method, the initial stages of each mission are completely non-linear. There are generally around three main objectives at the start of each mission, and these can be dealt with as the player chooses. After they're done, though, the game descends into linearity as new objectives are hurled at the player one at a time.

The order of events aside, *Airborne* is a fun shooter. It is very focused on action and delivers the story in a very cinematic style. Big explosions and heroic gunfights are more reminiscent of *A Bridge Too Far* than *Band of Brothers*, but this game is all about heroics, avoiding the angst that other titles may choose to feature. The single-player campaign is a little too short though, and the multiplayer a little lacklustre.

Nevertheless, a comprehensive rating system and persistent weapon upgrades provide a reason to replay missions already completed.

The action is intense in this title, with a fairly intelligent AI providing the enemy troops (Nazi Germans, mostly, with a few fascist Italians thrown in at the beginning for that Mediterranean flavour). Actually, the AI is pretty good as long as it is applied to foot soldiers. The very few vehicles that the player needs to take on tend to either sit in one spot or drive around in circles. Sure, they pack a punch, but it's easy to find cover if you know where they are going next.

Graphically, this title is almost perfect. Awesome lighting effects and depth of field focus shifts when using a sniper scope are the order of the day, and the environments and objects within them are beautifully represented. Long-range sniping did result in a bug or two (but nothing extremely serious). For the most part, the game runs well and is great fun.

If you like your action fast paced and almost arcade-like (the weapon upgrades help cement that image) then *Medal of Honor: Airborne* is a good one for you. It's more light hearted than other WWII FPS titles, while still presenting the player with a challenge. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Most other *Medal of Honor* titles



»»»

BETTER THAN



»»»

FOR FANS OF

»»»

**BOTTOM LINE**

Over-the-top WWII action...with parachutes

**80**  
OUT OF 100





## SPIDER-MAN: FRIEND OR FOE

RRP → R375 | Publisher → Activision | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Action

WHEN I HEARD THAT yet another *Spider-Man* game was being released, I couldn't help but feel exasperated. It is very obvious that the previous games were developed just to make a quick buck off the movie releases and weren't very good. However, while a *Spider-Man* game usually ends up being a swing and fight type of game with almost no story to it, *Spider-Man: Friend or Foe* seems to be the opposite (with a few ideas taken from *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*).

The story revolves around a series of meteor strikes around the world, and a subsequent rise in criminal activity. An unknown villain is using pieces of the meteors to control Spidey's enemies. The only way to stop this villain is to free his slaves and have them, along with a few

other characters from the Marvel universe, team up with Spidey. This brings some great elements to play, because now a player can decide to play as the Green Goblin, Rhino, Doc Ock, or even Venom.

The gameplay is more action-orientated than that of *Ultimate Alliance*, with less going into character building. Nevertheless, there are abilities that the player must earn throughout the game. Players are able to switch between Spidey and his sidekick on the fly, or have another person join in for very enjoyable cooperative play.

While the game is good in many aspects, it should be mentioned that the developers had a younger audience in mind with this game. While it is a lot of fun and packed with action, it is also very easy to the point that a six year

old could play it with no problem. In the end though, *Spider-Man: Friend or Foe* is a solid title for all ages and a good party game if the situation arises. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



### BOTTOM LINE

A unique web-slinging experience for heroes and villains alike.

**85**  
OUT OF 100



## GUITAR HERO ENCORE: ROCKS THE 80S

RRP → R375 | Publisher → RedOctane | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Music

EXPANSION PACKS SUCH AS this usually present a challenge in terms of writing a review, because in all honesty what can one say? It's easy to laundry-list the new tracks and perhaps mention the few (if any) changes to the core mechanics, but this gives no more of an indication of its actual quality than from what can be gained by reading the back of the box yourself.

So, we decided to do it a little differently this time.

We inserted the *Rocks the 80s* into a PS2 with two guitar controllers hooked up, and invited some *Guitar Hero* fans over to check it out. Suffice to say, they loved it. That's all you need to know. You can stop reading now. Still here? Okay, fine. The first thing noticed

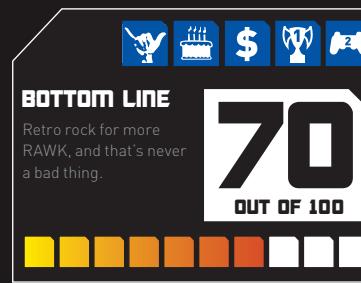
was that the introduction movie is literally identical to the one in *Guitar Hero II* except that the backtrack has been changed and the clothing on the characters now suits the era of the music contained within. The selectable characters are younger versions of themselves, remodeled into the 80s influence quite nicely (check out the hairstyles!).

Beyond that, it was everything *Guitar Hero* has always been – just with a new selection of music to play but minus any bonus tracks to unlock. There are six tiers, each with five songs (for a total of 30) which include classics such as "I Ran (So Far Away)" and "I Wanna Rock".

There is nothing wrong with *Rocks the 80s*, if taken in context. It's more *Guitar Hero*, and

that is never a bad thing. The price point is high, so budget-conscious gamers may want to wait for a reduced price (if you can wait that long). **NAG**

Miktar "Glam Rock" Dracon





## VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

RRP → R545 | Publisher → SEGA Europe | Distributor → Nu Metro Interactive | Genre → Fighting

**T**o avoid repeating the same information unnecessarily, please refer to our review of the Xbox 360 version of *Virtua Fighter 5* (page 76, June 2007). The PlayStation 3 version is practically identical to the Xbox 360 version, with only a few noticeable (and perhaps very important) differences.

Fans of the series will be interested to know that the PS3 version is based on the Version B arcade revision of *Virtua Fighter 5* (unlike the 360 version, which is based on the newer Version C, which fixes up several gameplay issues). It is unclear why the PS3 version uses the outdated revision. While the 360 version includes online support via Xbox LIVE for one-on-one versus, the PlayStation 3 version lacks any kind of online play. The developers have suggested

that the PS3 version could be made online-enabled via a downloadable patch, but since the announcement of *Virtua Fighter Online* for the PS3, such a thing seems unlikely. The final difference between the PS3 and 360 versions is that of visual fidelity. Plainly put, the PS3 version is visually inferior and suffers from very jagged edges due to a lack of proper antialiasing and on occasion framerate judders are noticeable.

Such issues aside, *Virtua Fighter 5* remains a stunning addition to the series and fans should be quite happy with it. The lack of online play is a disappointment, especially since the only excuse the developers have released for the oversight is "lack of time", because they "wanted to get it out as soon as possible". We

think fans would have been willing to wait a little while longer for proper online implementation, especially since the 360 version already has it. **NAG**

Miktar "WATTA! WOOO!" Dracon



### BOTTOM LINE

It's *Virtua Fighter 5*, with a few issues and no online play.

**69**  
OUT OF 100



## SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE

RRP → 800 points | Publisher → Empire Interactive | Distributor → Xbox LIVE Arcade | Genre → Futuristic Sports Simulation

**S**PEEDBALL 2 IS A futuristic sport simulation played in a metal arena with a metal ball. There are two teams of nine players each with three reserves, two goals and some ice cream for injury time. Oh, and Brutal Deluxe is the name of the team you play and manage. Like soccer, the team that throws the ball into the opposite goal scores points. Besides scoring goals, players also earn points by throwing the ball against targets on the walls of the arena. There are also warp holes, ball electrifiers, score multipliers and other features to spice up the action. Money (coins in the arena) can be collected while you play and later used to upgrade your team's statistics. Instant upgrades are also found randomly scattered about in the arena as well as temporary power-ups that might, for example, freeze the opposing team or simply transfer possession of the ball to your centre forward. To round it

off, various matches and tournaments are all playable against computer-controlled teams. Thanks to its frantic pace and erratic action, there haven't been many games in the short history of gaming that can claim to have destroyed as many joysticks as *Speedball 2* has. First released in 1990, on the Commodore Amiga, *Speedball 2* is referred to by many as one of the best Amiga games ever developed.

The Xbox LIVE Arcade version is a true conversion of the original Amiga game with a few cosmetic improvements such as more teams to play against, online support and an optional graphical update. Don't bother switching to the flashier-looking 3D graphics because they don't add anything to a game best played in its original 2D 16-bit format.

As a warning, this one will mean more from a nostalgic perspective and doesn't offer much

in terms of variation and depth for players used to more modern games. There also aren't too many people playing this online, so finding a game will be difficult. So then, one for the fans that might leave newcomers wondering what all the fuss is about. **NAG**

Michael James



### BOTTOM LINE

It's fast, frantic and fun, especially when playing against friends.

**70**  
OUT OF 100





## PRO CYCLING MANAGER: TOUR DE FRANCE 2007

RRP → R270 | Publisher → Focus | Distributor → Apex Interactive | Genre → Sports | PC Spec → 1 2 3 4 5

I WAS NOT VERY IMPRESSED with *Pro Cycling Manager: Tour De France 2007*. It seemed way too technical for the average person to enjoy. Because of this, I had to enlist the help of an expert for this review. He is a professional cyclist and what he had to say about the game and what I thought were completely different. While I thought that the game was too technical, he thought that it was pretty well thought out and easy to figure out (taking real cycling into consideration). He also loved the fact that while the game was easier than he thought it would be, it still demonstrated some true cycling experiences, such as using cyclists to take turns taking the lead, thus giving the others a break or giving one a chance to make a break to win. He was

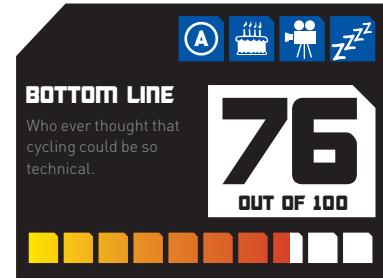
completely taken by how the game adjusted its physics for each cyclist.

Then there is the Manager mode where the player must choose in which events to enter his team and which cyclists to use. I never knew that certain cyclists are better for certain races. I always thought that a cyclist just chose to ride in either cross country or short races and that anyone could do anything, depending on their fitness levels. I was completely wrong. My friend explained it to me and while I battled to work out the management of the game, he whizzed through it.

Anyway, while he found the game incredibly easy to figure out, it still took me at least an hour to get the hang of it. However, once I had, the game was fun and good in

multiplayer modes. If you follow cycling, then you cannot miss out on this. It is truly a unique gaming experience. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



## MARK DAVIS PRO BASS CHALLENGE

RRP → R270 | Publisher → Natsume Inc. | Distributor → Apex Interactive | Genre → Sports

MAYBE SOME GAMES SHOULD never be imported to our country. Maybe the containers on those ships should be loaded with games we actually want, or the ships should be sunk instead. However, as reality goes, it kicks us in the butt and gives us games like *Mark Davis Pro Bass Challenge*. The back of the box boasts the man's amazing fishing achievement, and honestly, I'm proud of the guy. However, if I had ESPN, I would have preferred finding out about him that way. Instead, someone again decided that fishing games must venture outside the bounds of interactive coin-operated games. Yes, that's right. You try to cash a fish with the PlayStation 2 controller and enjoy it.

What bothered me the most is that the game doesn't even have a tutorial - just silly little videos teaching you nothing. After struggling with the controls, you will soon find that real fishing needs less hardware rendering and is more fun. However, if you stick to it, you will be introduced to a very bad-looking and -sounding game. At least the fish look hungry, but not as hungry as you would be for some real gameplay. Everything from the aiming system to the casting and reeling is more irritating than visiting someone in hospital. One tip I can give you to get some fun out of this game is to make it a family event. Gather your parents and sibling and split into two teams. Then, in 30-second intervals, see who

can come up with the most uses for the disc without using the PS2. No points for using it as a Frisbee; we've all have done that. **NAG**

Eddie Francisc





## RICOCHET INFINITY

RRP → \$19.95 | Publisher → Reflexive | Distributor → www.ricochetinfinity.com | Genre → Arcade | PC Spec → 1 2 3 4 5

**WHAT'S THE OLD SAYING?** There are only nine or eleven original stories? At the end of the day you can only have so many original base concepts – the real trick is how you make something familiar into something new. That can't be more true with classic games like break-out clones. The idea is very familiar: you have a ball which you deflect with a paddle you control. The aim is to break all the blocks in a wall opposite the paddle. There have been countless games that used this formula, but the best of the new breed remain the *Ricochet* games from Reflexive, a studio that in itself is well known for its quirky reinvention of classic puzzle games.

*Ricochet Infinity* puts you against dozens

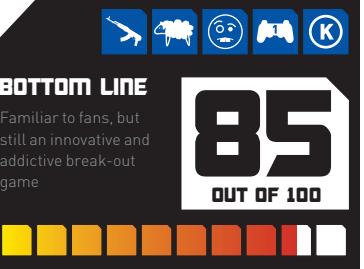
and dozens of tricky levels with trickier blocks. There are vanilla blocks that just shatter on impact and the sturdier variety that need a few knocks to go. But then there are ones that explode, ones that can only be hit on one side, ones that tunnel through other blocks when hit, ones that spin, ones that act as switches and so on. Your own arsenal can be impressive. The paddle, represented as a ship, can get power-ups like rocket launchers and laser sights. The ball can be transformed into fire, acid or the unstoppable rail mode. Each level is designed around a theme, which can be surreal or realistic, and the levels are often animated, which means the blocks don't stand still. It's easy in the beginning, but the later levels are



very tricky and will make you scream. But it's too addictive to stop. Another solid break-out game from the Reflexive camp.

**NAG**

James Francis



## BIG KAHUNA REEF 2: CHAIN REACTION

RRP → \$19.95 | Publisher → Reflexive | Distributor → www.reflexive.com | Genre → Puzzle | PC Spec → 1 2 3 4 5

**WHEN IT COMES TO** Bejeweled clones, there are as many out there as there are fish in the sea. About the best thing we can say about *Big Kahuna Reef 2: Chain Reaction* is that it's one of them.

Set in an aquatic environment, the basic premise of the game [wait for the cliché] is to match three or more of the same tile, thus removing them from the game. Match five or more, and you get an explosive power-up tile. The more tiles you match, the bigger the 'bomb'. When tiles are removed from the board, new ones filter in from the top and can potentially set off larger chain reactions – pretty standard fair.

*Big Kahuna Reef 2* differs from Bejeweled in a couple of ways, but none of them really makes that big a splash. (Get it?) Instead of a standard rectangular game board, the

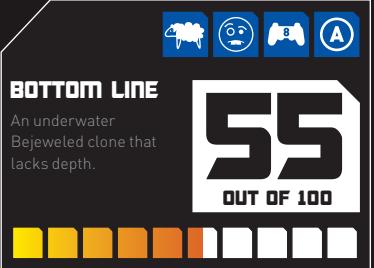
play area can be of any shape or size. You don't match coloured gems, but sea urchins, prawns, starfish, etc. You advance from level to level by matching tiles on wooden boards, thereby breaking them and exposing water underneath. Clear all the boards, and you've finished the level.

Upon completing levels in the Quest mode, you unlock different types of fish that inhabit your virtual reef. The game boasts 44 amazing fish in all, and each of them comes with a short description of its eating habits and habitat. You can even set your Windows screensaver to this fishy background. Try not to get too excited. The one innovative feature *Big Kahuna Reef 2* offers is its multiplayer mode. Dubbed "Mouse Party," up to eight players can connect a mouse to the same PC and play either competitively or cooperatively on the same game board.

While kids may find this game entertaining (and even educational, especially if you're writing a report on tropical fish), we can think of a lot of casual games that are more worthy of your time (see our review of *Puzzle Quest* in the December 2007 issue of NAG).

**NAG**

Chris Bistline





## TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

RRP → R375 | Publisher → Ubisoft | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Platform

**T**MNT WAS IN FACT my very first Nintendo Wii experience, besides the packaged *Wii Sports*. It was a good game overall, but I found it lacking in many aspects. To begin with, the control system is pathetic. The developers tried to use the motion controls, which unfortunately make one flail around the room stupidly, unable to do simple punches and kicks. On the upside, it does give one a very good workout. The game itself is extremely easy, but at times it manages to be the exact opposite. This leaves the young ones at a loss and needing help, while older players will be discouraged given the general lack of difficulty shown otherwise. I say this because while the

game is supposed to be action-orientated, there really is only one attack button and an extreme lack of combos. In fact, each turtle only has one or two at most.

The storyline closely follows that of the movie, but unfortunately the voice-overs are not the same (although this time round, the actors did better than the movie's). *TMNT*, while very easy in terms of the action, can be a solid platform game at times. If the developers had put more effort into the control system, it could very easily have rivalled Nintendo's many platformers that are slowly hitting the market. In the end though, if you are a *TMNT* fan, you will probably enjoy this

game. However, if you own any other console, rather get *TMNT* for it as this version ruins the experience. **NAG**

Justin Slabbert



## THRILLVILLE: OFF THE RAILS

RRP → 299 | Publisher → LucasArts | Distributor → Megarom | Genre → Strategy

**T**HRILLVILLE: OFF THE RAILS, the sequel to LucasArts' 2006 title, makes its Wii debut, and once again manages to deliver an impressive mixture of management and construction genres, with a substantial roster of mini games thrown in for good measure.

Initially, the management aspect seems a little overwhelming, though it soon becomes apparent that for the most part, the theme parks tend to run themselves - so long as you stick to fulfilling the 'mission objectives' in each park. These range from building specific rides and achieving high scores in some of the mini games, to managing your staff and chatting to guests.

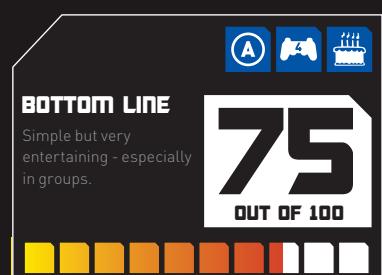
The most impressive aspects of the game are undoubtedly the roller coaster construction and the mini games. Making

good use of the Wii Remote and Nunchuk, you can build not only roller coasters, but also racetracks and mini-golf courses as you see fit, and then even try them out yourself (which is surprisingly satisfying). In addition to go-kart style racing and putt-putt, the more than 30 mini games include the addictive 'Stuntrider' biking game, the cute but oh-so-fun platform game, 'Sparkle Quest', as well as remote-control car demolition derbies, robot boxing, first-person shooters, and the side-scrolling, beat-'em-up 'Bandito Chinchilla'.

*Thrillville: Off the Rails*, despite its simplicity and sometimes sickening cuteness, is an enjoyable outing and quite well suited to the Wii. Although the single-player mode becomes tedious after a while, there is an

impressive list of simple and fun mini games, which are fantastic for party play. With a few friends and additional Wii Remotes, you cannot go wrong. **NAG**

Adam Liebman



NAME THE GAMES AND WIN A PRIZE FROM MEGAROM!

megarom  
interactive

## WIN THIS!

**NAME THE GAME AND WIN!** You don't need to know them all, but if you know enough you could win a copy of *Haze* for PlayStation 3, courtesy of Megarom. E-mail your answers (with the subject line "Name That Game December") to [nagcomps@tidmedia.co.za](mailto:nagcomps@tidmedia.co.za), and be sure to include your name, phone number and postal address (or you might not get your prize!). Congratulations to Ryan Bright, our October winner. Your copy of *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* is on the way!



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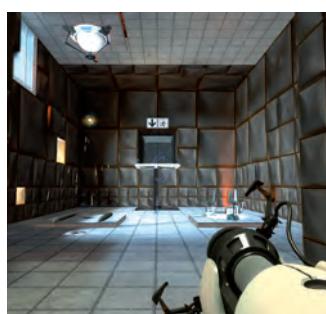
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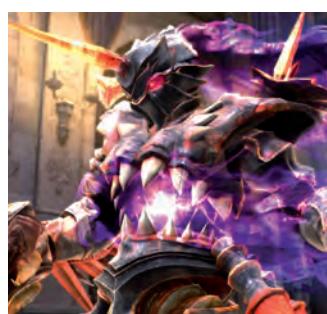
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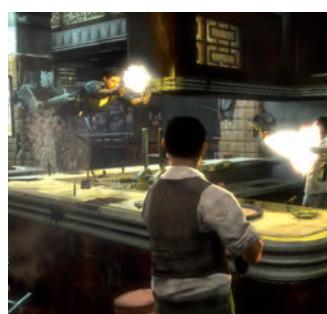
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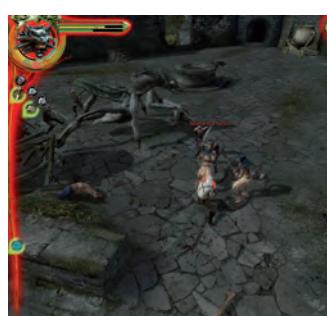
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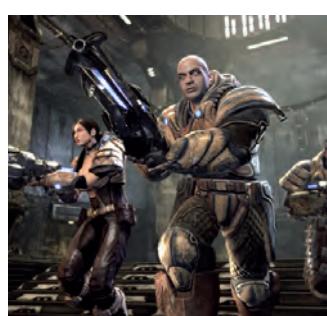
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**LAST MONTH'S GAMES:** 1. *Baldur's Gate*; 2. *Crash Bandicoot*; 3. *Devil May Cry*; 4. *Dungeon Siege*; 5. *Far Cry*; 6. *Halo 3*; 7. *Marble Madness*; 8. *Mega Man*; 9. *New Zealand Story*; 10. *Quake Wars*; 11. *Quake*; 12. *Shogo*; 13. *Strife*; 14. *Team Fortress 2*; 15. *Titan Quest*; 16. *Xevious*

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# REINVENTING THE CELLPHONE

CELLPHONES ARE A DRAG. SURE, IT'S NICE TO CALL PEOPLE FROM WHEREVER YOU FIND YOURSELF, BUT THE SOFTWARE USUALLY SUCKS. GOOGLE KNOWS THAT AND IT HAS A PLAN TO MAKE US ALL LOVE OUR MOBILES.



**F**OR MONTHS AND MONTHS, everyone speculated about Google and the mobile market. It looked like the famed Internet giant was going to release its own Gphone. The signs were all certainly there - Google purchased mobile social networking service Dodgeball, created applications for Google services that work on mobile phones and had talks with several prominent mobile software start-ups. Just like the Google search engine, the Gphone seemed like a perfect way to go. Perfect, that is, if you prefer to stay inside the box. Naturally, Google had other plans and soon revealed that it wasn't planning a phone of its own. It will just settle for reinventing the entire mobile industry.

That's a tall order, even for a behemoth like Google. How would you go about changing an industry full of different brands, software and standards? Even Java, a language designed to be platform agnostic, has not been successful in getting the various mobile devices to play along. That is thanks to buggy Java development kits, not to mention that mobile manufacturers all prefer to develop their own Java tools and standards. Thus what works on one model of phone might very likely not work on another phone at all - this obviously completely defeats the purpose of Java. But it also creates exactly the kind of problem Google can solve. And it intends to solve it with Android.

Android comes from a Palo Alto start-up that Google bought a few months ago. Running on a Linux kernel, it is an open source operating system for phones. Once Google is done with initial development, it will release

Android along with a public SDK. While coders will still use Java to create their apps, Android gives everything they do a common base - one that is already designed for and accompanied by many different apps and libraries. Let's put it simply: Android plans to level the playing field between different mobile brands and models. Right now, mobile development is a nightmare and versions of an app or game need to be made for at least every brand of phone, if not most of the models you plan to support. Mobile games sometimes require over a hundred different SKUs. Obviously that is not efficient nor really inspiring. With Android, which is largely built on Open source software, developers will be able to make one application that scales across phones using Android as an OS.

This isn't a pipe dream, either. It's

also not a closed initiative - Google has been prolific in the past in helping third-party developers work with its software development kits (SDK) and this is going to be the case with Android as well. But best of all, Android will be open source and very accessible. That means that, if it takes off, we can expect a lot more stuff for our mobile phones. One prototype software combines your phone's GPS with Google Maps to show you where the people in your phone book are. A column on Zenandgames.com points out the more obvious: loads of games can be made this way and thanks to the open source approach, developers won't need the approval of mobile companies. So, expect lots of retro remakes and sufficient warning that what you install is your own responsibility. Could Google Android herald an age of true open development for your cellphone? Can we expect tons of homebrew software and games to entertain us with? Will the shackles finally fall off the most important piece of technology humanity has adopted in the past decade? Here's hoping... **NAG**



## ALL NAG MOBILE REVIEWS ARE DONE ON THE NOKIA N81

Landscape gaming with dedicated game keys • Digital music player for high quality music playback • High quality stereo speakers • 3.5mm stereo headphone plug • Bluetooth technology • New 3D multimedia menu • 2 megapixel camera

# PREVIEWS

## BUST-A-MOVE

Publisher → Square Enix

**P**UZZLE GAMES WILL PROBABLY always be the most popular on the mobile platform, but this does raise a slight problem – how do developers keep the games fresh and exciting. After all, there are only so many things that can be done. After a while, the ideas start running short.

One method that has been proving successful of late has been to start looking back instead of forward. The result is that a number of popular classics, whether from coin-op arcade machines or older videogame consoles, have started appearing on mobile phones around the world. We have seen *Space Invaders*, *Bomber Man* and *Tetris*, and even “newer” titles like *Metal Slug*.

One such title, which is heading towards mobile soon, is *Bust-a-Move*, a true classic and very popular title. The company responsible for this is a bit of a surprise: it's Square Enix, who are better known for their console-based-role-playing games and work done for handhelds like the Nintendo DS.

But enough with the developer talk. *Bust-a-Move* on the mobile platform will be virtually identical to the popular arcade game that many of us older gamers fed far too many coins into,

instead of studying hard to become people who earn a lot of money. The basic idea works like this: rows of coloured bubbles descend from the top of the screen. If they reach the bottom, you're screwed. To combat the advance of these obviously predatory squishy things, the player is armed with a launcher, which fires off bubbles very similar to the ones descending menacingly towards the player's position at the bottom of the screen. Don't worry... the launcher-bubbles are good bubbles. They won't rebel and swamp the player.

This launcher is in a fixed position, but can be aimed at the descending bubbles. The bubbles from the launcher need to be matched [in terms of colour] with those coming from the top. Three or more bubbles of the same colour result in the top bubbles [along with the fired one] err... bursting.

The game will feature many levels, each one more difficult than the previous one. Interspersed amongst these will be boss levels.

This game will raise an interesting point about mobile service provision in this country. While the telephony side of things is going well, very few people in the industry seem to take the gaming side of things seriously. *Bust-*



*a-Move* will feature a multiplayer version, which, for the most part, will be unavailable to local players. If the suggestion that Nokia's Snap mobile service providing a multiplayer platform for this game comes through, no problem – simply connecting to the site will allow South African players to compete against their friends anywhere in the world.

Whether or not multiplayer will be possible is not that important though – what really counts is that *Bust-a-Move* will provide mobile gamers with a new look at an old puzzle classic. **NAG**



## MEGACITY EMPIRE

Publisher → Gameloft

**I**T HAPPENS EVERY SO often that a game appears on mobile that could be considered a blatant knock-off of a title on another platform. They probably are. The fact is, though, that these titles do well because the concept behind them is already fairly well understood. Additionally, it is unlikely that the games they are ‘emulating’ will get official mobile versions, so it's sort of forgiveable that the developers produce these titles.

*Megacity Empire*, aside from the rather clumsy name, looks like it should be the perfect mobile fix for all those city management fans out there. The aim of the game is to build a city... well, actually, it is to build New York City, complete with the Empire State Building, Central Park and the Statue of Liberty.

The game will offer 32 different types of buildings to construct, as well as 15 scenario missions and a ‘sandbox’ mode. Potentially, it represents massive replay value, putting it up into the kind of space generally only occupied by puzzle games. In addition to city building and management, the player will also be required to deal with disasters.

This kind of title is fairly new to the mobile platform, and it will be interesting to see how *Megacity Empire* compares against other, more traditional mobile games. **NAG**



## DEVIL MAY CRY: DANTE'S AWAKENING

Publisher → Capcom

**C**APCOM SEEMS TO BE becoming more and more keen on the mobile platform. *Resident Evil* has seen a release for handsets and, in February, the Japanese gaming giant will be releasing a mobile version of their popular *Devil May Cry* franchise. That's right, you can have Dante right there on your phone!

The thing that sets this game apart from the average mobile action adventure is that *Devil May Cry: Dante's Awakening* will be presented as a 3D game. Rumour has it that this title is a conversion of the PS2 version of *Devil May Cry 3*. Whatever it is, there will be some interesting questions raised by this title. For example, will the generally small size of game downloads restrict the length of the game, or will Capcom opt for a bigger install file? Also, will lower end phones cope with the unquestionably more intense graphics of this game, or will it only be playable on the more powerful, more modern phones?

The most interesting question is this: If Capcom can do it, why aren't others? Prominent mobile game developers are churning out piles of releases every month, but these games are still stuck in 2D mode, and there doesn't seem to much sign of that changing.

This stylish addition to the world of mobile games may well be a sign of changing times. Should the game work well and prove popular (and we believe that both of those things will happen), other developers may well need to rethink their strategies. **NAG**

# REVIEWS

## BEOWULF

Publisher→ Gameloft | Genre→ Action scroller | Rating→ 65  
 Download→ SMS NAG011 to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R50

**T**HE PROBLEM WITH THE wide accessibility offered by mobile games is that it is often open to exploitation. Sure, having a wide audience that is generally easier to please than most other gamers is going to result in folks taking a bit of advantage here and there, but sometimes it gets a bit much. And those times generally have something to do with the release of a major motion picture.

*Beowulf*, for example, is a game that takes the hype created around a highly-anticipated movie and relies on it for success. To be completely honest, there is nothing new in this game. It is as though a gameplay principle template has been applied to new character graphics and levels. There is nothing original or new about this title, just like none of the other recent movie-based games.

*Beowulf* is fun to play, has good graphics and offers a good distraction for a few hours, but the fact is that if you have played other releases of a similar nature on your mobile phone recently, you aren't in for any

surprises. We have all played this game many times before, albeit with different characters and settings.

Without wanting to climb onto any higher a soap box, the question has to be asked: are developers going to keep using the excuse of "limited capabilities" offered by mobile handsets? We have, in the past, seen fantastic titles full of innovative ideas. Why, then, should games that are licensed from another form of entertainment be so lacklustre and unoriginal?

Sure, people are going to play this title, and when they do they will experience a game that is responsive and entertaining. The control scheme is good – better than some of this title's predecessors, in fact. The sound is passable, and the story line is one of the better ones out there. But the lack of originality and the formulaic nature of the game are blatant and obvious blemishes that make this particular game little more than an obvious cash-in. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



## DOGZ

Publisher→ Gameloft | Genre→ Simulator  
 Rating→ 79 | Download→ SMS NAG014 to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R40

**T**HE IDEA BEHIND THIS title is grand, although it is something taken from the Nintendo DS platform. This game requires the player to raise a virtual puppy, training it and treating it in the way that good owners would treat a real dog.

It's basically a Tamagochi for your mobile phone and, while it does have a certain appeal and offers much more longevity than the average mobile game, the game does get a little old quite quickly. The appeal to the younger market is fantastic, and *Dogz* presents a title that parents can get for their kids with great confidence.

With good graphics and excellent control, *Dogz* is fun to play. There are a number of things to do, so the game dynamic doesn't become repetitive too quickly, although the 'routine' that the pet owner needs adds an obvious amount of repetition.

This mobile version doesn't beat the game's distant cousin, *Nintendogs*, but it does provide a fun and rewarding distraction, particularly for younger players. Other than the obvious odour problems, though, it's no replacement for the real thing. On the bright side, installing *Dogz* on your mobile will not result in your phone sniffing crotches... **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



## BLOCK BREAKER DELUXE

Publisher→ THQ Wireless | Genre→ Sports  
 Rating→ 92 | Download→ SMS NAG017 to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R30

**T**HE BREAKOUT CLONE – there have been so many of them. But why not? The idea behind *Breakout* has always been an entertaining one. It requires dexterity and foresight, while at the same time allowing you to break stuff. It is, of course, the game where you bounce a ball off a paddle towards a wall of blocks at the top of the screen. The object of the game is to break all the bricks before you run out of balls, which you lose if you miss them with the paddle. Since the original game, the genre has evolved a lot, including power-ups and complicated block layouts and movements. The modern era of *Breakout* games eventually become very hard in later levels and that's no different for *Block Breaker Deluxe*, a game that combines slick visuals with an interesting setting. You play in underground *Breakout* parlours, beating various seedy characters and working your way up the illegal league. Sure, *Breakout* being illegal is a stretch, but all of this creates a nice world to play in. Control wise, the paddle can be a bit hard to manoeuvre properly and the game is best played with a small joystick. Other than that, it's a fine *Breakout* game. **NAG**

James Francis

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mobile

game



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Mobile Game: R50

AT CINEMAS 23 NOVEMBER

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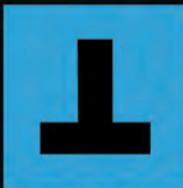
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gameloft



GAMES



MY PHONE



LIFESTYLE



# REVIEWS

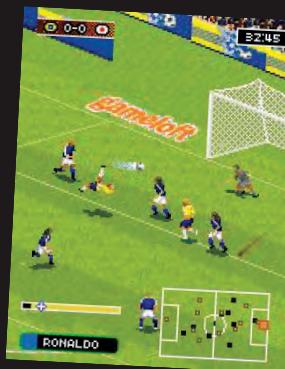
## REAL FOOTBALL 2007

Publisher→ Gameloft | Genre→ Sport | Rating→ 90  
 Download→ SMS NAG012 to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R40

**N**OW HERE'S A MOBILE gaming winner. *Real Football 2007* offers the player an exciting and entertaining way to either get in a quick game, or spend a few hours at play. With various game modes, the player can choose how best to spend their time with the game, playing friendlies, league and cup matches.

*Real Football 2007* adds up to be one of the best sports simulations on the mobile platform. With smooth movement and realistic player reactions, the game matches up to early version of *FIFA* on console... and that's only because the graphics can't truly be compared to modern version of that game. In mobile terms, though, *Real Football 2007* looks great. The visuals are clear and the action never gets confusing.

This title's only real weakness (and this is the case with most similar titles on the mobile platform) are the controls.

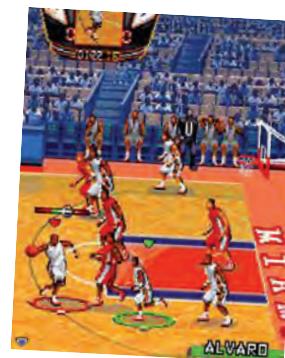


Advanced controls can get a little tricky, and the player will be using every button their keypad has to offer to play the game in even its simplest form.

Aside from the rather strenuous thumb work-out that this title

represents, there is little that *Real Football 2007* can be faulted on. If football is your thing, this will make a perfect addition to your gaming arsenal. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



## PRO RALLY RACING

Publisher→ Gameloft | Genre→ Racing  
 Rating→ 88 | Download→ SMS NAG013 to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R50

**T**IS REALLY GREAT to see advancement in mobile games, simply because the medium is often under-explored. Gameloft's *Pro Rally Racing* takes things a little further than before, offering a racing simulator that is a little more challenging and requires a little more thought.

Graphically, the game is well handled. The tracks, which are represented in 3D, are a little bland, but the modelling on the cars is excellent, all things considered.

What really makes it stand out as a racing sim, though, is the addition of differing driving conditions. This may seem obvious, but it's quite a step for the mobile game market. Now the player will need to contend with different track and weather conditions, and will have to compensate for them in playing the game.

A variety of vehicles and events can be unlocked during the course of the title. Getting those unlocks can be tricky, because controlling the car in this game is sometimes very difficult, due to environmental factors. It's not that the controls are bad – they just take a bit of getting used to, and require a little more finesse than the average mobile racing simulator. But fans of racing games should certainly give this one a spin... it's well worth the effort. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

## KOBE BRYANT PRO BASKETBALL 2008

Publisher→ Gameloft | Genre→ Sport  
 Rating→ 90 | Download→ SMS NAG016 to 083 123 686 | RRP→ R50

**I**DON'T KNOW WHO KOBE Bryant is, but one can deduce he's a basketball star. The sport has its fans locally, but the appeal for the virtual version is probably higher, given how well the fast pace of basketball lends itself to a videogame. There have been plenty of basketball titles on larger platforms, but the mobile arena has been slow, mainly thanks to the complexity that can come with it. Sports games might not demand a lot on controls, but with the speed you have to react at and the limited space on a phone's keypad, things will become tricky. Still, this is Gameloft's second attempt and it pulls the job off smoothly. Ideally you'd like to use a thumbstick to play this game, but even button-bashing can do. It might not get you through the entire 80-game season, though. There is also a challenge mode to practice your shots at the hoop and graphically *Kobe Bryant* shines. Probably the best mobile basketball game you can find right now. **NAG**

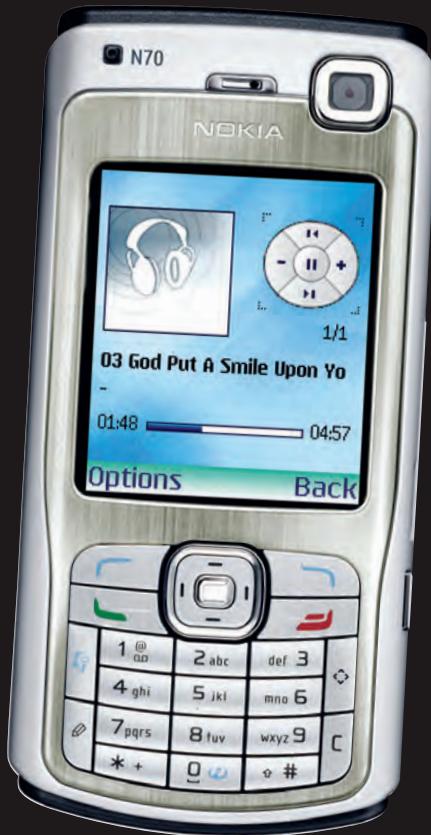
James Francis

# HARDWARE

## NOKIA N70 MUSIC EDITION

Supplier → Nokia | RRP → TBA

Screen Size → 176 x 208 pixel  
Colour Depth → 256,000 colors TFT  
Battery Standby → 265 hours  
Internal Memory → 22MB  
Size → 108.8 x 53 x 21.8 mm



**NOKIA HAS LONG BEEN** the market leader in the mobile phone industry and, despite a design hiccup a few years ago, has always delivered handsets that are attractive, easy to use and powerful.

The N70 is such a handset. As part of the upper-range Nseries, the N70 is a beautifully designed and wonderfully functional handset. The special "Music Edition" that was released a while ago comes with a 1GB memory stick and features fantastic music playback as well as great work and leisure options.

But what's it like as a gaming phone? The answer is a little more complicated than a straight "it's good" or "it's bad." The truth is that the N70 has elements that make it a good gaming phone and others that make it a... not so good gaming phone.

The N70 is a powerful device, which means that gaming applications run very smoothly on it. It is stable too, and the added space provided by the memory card supplied with the Music Edition doesn't hurt. Additionally, it has a large, clear screen, which never hurts a gaming device. In fact, in terms of a

gaming phone, the N70 Music Edition has virtually everything going for it... except for the fact that the keypad is very small. The keys are quite compact and closely spaced, meaning that slip-ups (particularly when you're looking at the screen and not at the keys) regularly occur. This is not helped by the fact that the directional control is also very small, with a fairly large central button. Once again, Slip-ups happen quite often.

This is, of course, not an insurmountable problem. A little practice will have even the most ham-fisted person managing with the smaller keys, and the directional pad works very well as long as the player keeps to the outside ridge. A bit of patience will allow the player to make use of the power and reliability of the phone. That, combined with the excellent functionality it offers as a telephony handset, make it one of the better devices around. It's not cheap, but it is well worth the price, both as a mobile phone and as a gaming device. The Music Edition is particularly good, because you can fit a lot of games onto that 1GB memory card.

**NAG**

Walt Pretorius

MOBILE



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Mobile Game: R50

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**BBC**

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## WHY WE BUY

**A** FRIEND ONCE UTTERED THESE amazing words: 'He who dies with the most toys wins.'

This has now become more than a motto for me when people ask why I use an Intel Core 2 Extreme quad-core CPU, or why I'll immediately swap out my motherboard when I have any small issue such as the USB bandwidth being maxed out due to my USB 5.1 Bose sound system draining a massive 30% of the total allocation. Why do we strive for higher clock speeds, higher framerates, larger screens, and more power? Because I can and I simply want more toys than the guy sitting next to me! Make this your New Year resolution: upgrade that piece of crap you call a computer.

Plans are underway to add some spice to this section of the magazine, so should you have any questions, suggestions, slander or praise, direct your mail to [Len.nery@idimedia.co.za](mailto:Len.nery@idimedia.co.za).

From the February issue onwards, your questions, suggestions and opinions will be answered and/or used in two sections of NAG. The first section will be our new **Hardware Q&A** page where you may ask anything, no matter how technical or stupid. The second section is our **Dream Machine** page, where you will be able to voice your opinion, make suggestions and ask questions.

We'll answer truthfully without sarcasm or clever innuendoes. It will be to the point and aimed at helping you overclock, upgrade, modify or tweak your beloved computer.

Here is the important bit: We'll only consider mail with the subject heading "Hardware Q&A" or "NAG Dream Machine" - the rest will be moved to my folder called BIOS Flash Disk 13.

Happy New Year and I trust you will enjoy the read!

-Len Nery, Hardware Manager

## HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- 5** The stuff of Legends. Buy it while you can, I probably already have.
- 4** A good deal; worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3** About what you'd expect, no problems. You might want to wait for it to go on sale.
- 2** This has some issues. You should probably shop around for something else if possible.
- 1** The stuff of Nightmares. You'll probably be sorry you got one, even if it was free.

## THE BRIGHT FUTURE OF LED MONITORS

**D**URING THE SECOND QUARTER of 2008, you'll finally be able to choose between LCD and LED monitors. Here is a brief overview of what to expect:

LED technology is aimed at the graphics and gaming market because it delivers balanced brightness and bolder colours compared to cold cathode fluorescent lamp monitors.

Notebook manufacturers such as Apple are very keen on this technology because it consumes very little power, thereby extending mobile battery life. The downside at this stage is that manufacturers have yet to find a way of housing LED technology in the same thin bezel chassis we have become used to in slim-line LCD panels.

The Samsung SyncMaster XL20 has a strip of LEDs across the top and bottom of the panel. Sure, this is combination of LCD and LED and not a full LED display, but you will be suitably impressed.



## USB 3.0 SPEC CLOSER TO REALITY

### THE UNIVERSAL SERIAL BUS (USB)

3.0 Promoter Group is looking for additional contributors to its initial draft of the group's proposed specification, with a goal to have it completed by the first half of 2008.

SuperSpeed USB will be a backward-compatible standard with the same ease-of-use and plug-and-play capabilities of previous USB computer connection technologies, ports and cabling. The personal USB interconnect is aimed at delivering over ten times the speed of today's connections, and will be optimised for lower power consumption and improved protocol efficiency.

The USB 3.0 Promoter Group public Website ([www.usb.org/usb30](http://www.usb.org/usb30)) outlines the process to become a contributor to the specification. A company must be a USB Implementers Forum member in good standing and sign a USB 3.0 contributor agreement. The industry spec review with contributors will be held on 14 to 15 January in Las Vegas.

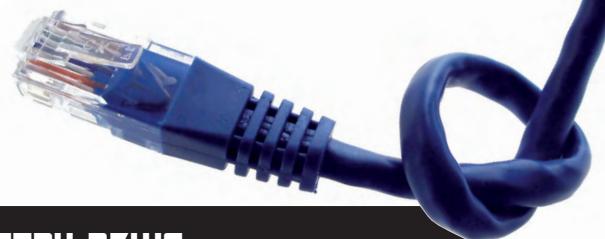
## 2010. RIP INTERNET!

**D**URING APRIL 2007, PESSIMISTIC speculators wanting to scare people and attract hits to their Websites wrote about the end of bandwidth as we know it because of the increasing demand for video streaming and user numbers increasing daily.

Author Edward Cone wrote, "The supply of available bandwidth, especially at the core of the Net, looks healthier than the pessimists would have it - or even bother to support with hard numbers when pressed to defend their arguments."

During November, we heard about Japanese researchers who were exploring a workable 100Tb/sec transfer rate over fibre optic cable.

At the heart of this is a technique called quadrature amplitude modulation (QAM), which has been stabilised using a special laser, making it feasible to pipe data at blistering speeds.



## INDUSTRY NEWS

Every month we receive many hardware-related press releases. We should probably put them somewhere, but don't worry; we'll keep them short.

**G**IGABYTE UNITED INC. ANNOUNCED the launch of its new graphics accelerator, the GV-NX88T512HP, equipped with NVIDIA's latest GeForce 8800 GT graphics processor. The GV-NX88T512HP features the GeForce 8800 GT with 512MB of GDDR3 memory, delivering the highest levels of sophisticated game rendering for a greatly enhanced gaming experience. Transporting users into a new realm of gaming excitement, the GIGABYTE GV-NX88T512HP features 112 processors as well as support for HDCP.

(High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection), providing the highest quality, high-definition video for the ultimate home theatre experience.

**F**OXCONN TECHNOLOGY CO., LTD. has recently launched the new GeForce 8800 GT 512MB. Designed for the enthusiast gaming segment, and priced at around R2,000, gaming enthusiasts can finally enjoy an unprecedented level of DirectX 10 graphics performance and realism in a single-slot solution without digging deep into their pockets.

# NAG'S DREAM MACHINE

Welcome to our second instalment of the Dream Machine, where we bring you our über l33t rig that in our opinion sets the benchmark and makes your fellow LAN buddies weak at the knees as you smile in the knowledge that you are the envy of thousands. In this issue, we have been swayed by the sexy sleek design of the Enermax Aurora keyboard and it therefore toppled the mighty Logitech G15. Other than that, the 45nm quad-core Intel CPU is still the drool accelerator coupled with the GIGABYTE motherboard and the awesome Zalman Reserator XT. Knocking on the solid gold door of NAG's Dream Machine is undoubtedly the Coolermaster Cosmos 1000 Chassis and the new NVIDIA 65nm GPU. In particular, the XFX Alpha Dog 8800 GT has our tails wagging in anticipation.

**QUESTION:** How do we award Dream Machine status to products?

**ANSWER:** Only once a product review has been published in this or earlier issues of NAG, will we bestow the honour of our prestigious lap dancing award upon it.

**Intel QX9650**  
Intel Corporation  
[011] 806-4530

**Acer AL2623W 26'' Widescreen LCD**  
AXIZ  
[011] 237-7000

**Lian-Li PC-V2000B Plus II**  
Frontier Electronics  
[011] 608-1809

**Enermax Aurora**  
Frontosa  
[011] 466-0038

**Zalman Reserator XT**  
Frontosa  
[011] 466-0038

**Saitek GM3200 Laser Mouse**  
The Prophecy Shop  
[011] 888-5564

**GIGABYTE GA-P35-DQ6**  
Rectron  
[011] 203-1000

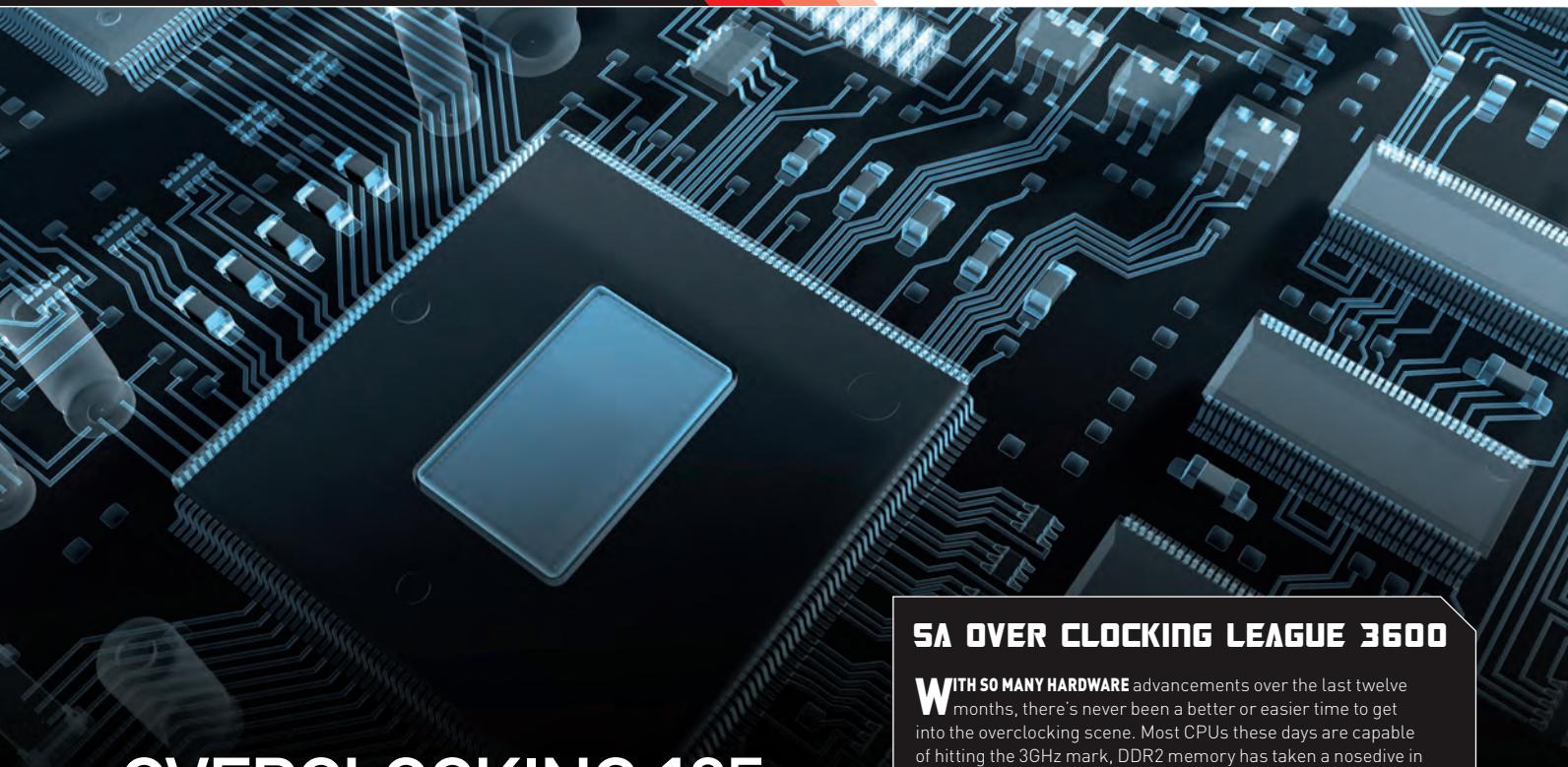
**Silverstone Strider 1000W-ST1000**  
NakedIT  
[011] 678-1288

**ASUS EAH2900XT/G/HTVDI/512M**  
AXIZ  
[011] 237-7000

**Patriot DDR2 PC2-9200**  
Syntech SA  
[021] 593-0304

**ASUS Xonar D2**  
AXIZ  
[011] 237-7000

**WD Caviar SE16**  
Drive Control  
[011] 201-8927



## OVERCLOCKING 105

**A**S MENTIONED LAST MONTH, in this fifth instalment in the Overclocking series, we'll be covering the operating system and its many options for optimising performance and stability. These tweaks may be similar to the ones used for tweaking game performance, but these are tailor made for maximising the speed of the operating system. These tweaks may have been considered secrets some time ago, but have become common knowledge in the Overclocking communities locally and abroad.

It is easy to assume that you are aware of all of them, which may be true to a large extent, but there just may be one that you need that will give you an advantage over someone with a similar or even better system.

The first one (and the easiest) we'll discuss is minimising the number of programs and services that are active on the system. This is quite simple, as it only really requires you to boot the operating system in diagnostics mode. This can be done in MSCONFIG, and depending on the amount of services you have running normally, the gains in performance could range from minimal to massive. Usually, for most people, even those who run lean systems, the amount of running services is somewhere between nineteen to forty. Running in Diagnostics mode usually brings that number down to ten (or less sometimes). Diagnostics mode not only frees up CPU cycles, but also memory: so for SuperPi, 3DMark2001 SE and AquaMark3, this mode is likely to give you the best results.

With that in mind, it is worth noting that the abovementioned benchmarks, along with the likes of PiFast, are likely the only benchmarks that will operate in Diagnostics mode. The rest of the Futuremark suite will not work because critical system services will not be operational. For these

benchmarks, minimising the number of active applications does help, but you will have to do this manually – in particular for 3DMark03 (which is heavily dependent on the graphics card). Therefore, it means that your tweaks will be related to your graphics card settings (provided the rest of your system is able to push your graphics card to its limits in the first place), as these will make a significant difference in the final score or test result. It also is worth noting that if any benchmark is likely to crash due to an unstable system, it will be 3DMark03. If any benchmark is likely to produce visual artefacts due to an over-aggressive GPU overclock, it's likely to be 3DMark03. Therefore, if you can stabilise 3DMark03 for multiple runs, chances are that 3DMark05 and 06 will not be a problem.

As for actually tweaking the operating environment, you need to make sure the correct options are ticked or at least selected, depending on the graphics card that you'll be using. One option not to forget is to disable any filtering other than bilinear filtering. Also, don't forget to disable VSynch (on NVIDIA graphics cards) and enable negative LOD bias, especially if you are using LOD settings. Clamping them to whatever LOD level you use will yield lower performance. It is also worth mentioning that the LOD level of 3DMark03, 05 and 06 is very similar. Usually, LOD +3 is where you want to start, and there will be slight variations of this setting depending on the graphics card you use (+3 is for GeForce 8800-series graphics cards).

Also note that when you run the benchmarks, you should ideally restart the system after each one unless you are testing stability, where running each benchmark one after the other will allow you to verify how stable your overclock is without sitting through hours of Prime95. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

### SA OVER CLOCKING LEAGUE 3600

**W**ITH SO MANY HARDWARE advancements over the last twelve months, there's never been a better or easier time to get into the overclocking scene. Most CPUs these days are capable of hitting the 3GHz mark, DDR2 memory has taken a nosedive in pricing and graphics power has increased. The objective is simple: tweak your system as much as you can, but not so much that you cannot use it for 24/7 operation. Since the upper limit for CPU clock speeds is 3.6GHz, there is no need for any type of exotic cooling and for the most part, a reference stock cooler will do. So why not put your system to the test and see how it compares to the competition? Rules can be found at [www.systemshock.co.za/forums](http://www.systemshock.co.za/forums) under the Overclocking & Tweaking section, and scores should be submitted there as well.

The top five in each benchmark at the time of going to print were:

#### AQUAMARK 3

1. Trax - 213,892
2. UncleBob - 209,985
3. Gouhan - 209,452
4. Zenith - 207,508
5. VoodooProphetII - 206,217

#### SUPERPI 1M

1. rra - 13,890
2. Trax - 13,891
3. VoodooProphetII - 13,953
4. Violater - 13,969
5. Gouhan - 13,969

#### SUPERPI 32M

1. Trax - 13:08:625
2. rra - 13:32:391
3. VoodooProphetII - 13:50:781
4. ColonelDebugger - 13:58:906
5. Deezil - 14:00:531

#### 3DMARK2001 SE

1. UncleBob - 69,299
2. Zenith - 67,689
3. Gouhan - 67,501
4. Trax - 67,264
5. Andy - 66,446

#### SISOFTWARE SANDRA 2008

1. Anakha56 - 11,349MB/sec
2. Andy - 10,084MB/sec
3. Gouhan - 9,674MB/sec
4. Trax - 9,663MB/sec
5. RRA - 9,373MB/sec

#### 3DMARK03 (BUILD 360)

1. UncleBob - 50,102
2. ColonelDebugger - 45,556
3. Gouhan - 45,517
4. Trax - 44,270
5. rra - 42,981

#### 3DMARK05

1. Gouhan - 22,440
2. rra - 21,901
3. UncleBob - 21,817
4. ColonelDebugger - 20,962
5. VoodooProphetII - 20,849

#### 3DMARK06

1. Gouhan - 15,651
2. NeoSteve - 14,703
3. rra - 14,207
4. UncleBob - 14,147
5. VoodooProphetII - 13,614

#### GLOBAL RANKINGS

1. Gouhan - 48 Points
2. UncleBob - 45 Points
3. rra - 43 Points
4. Trax - 43 Points
5. VoodooProphetII - 30 Points
6. ColonelDebugger - 27 Points
7. Zenith - 16 Points
8. Deezil - 13 Points
9. Andy - 12 Points
10. Anakha56 - 10 Points

# NAG

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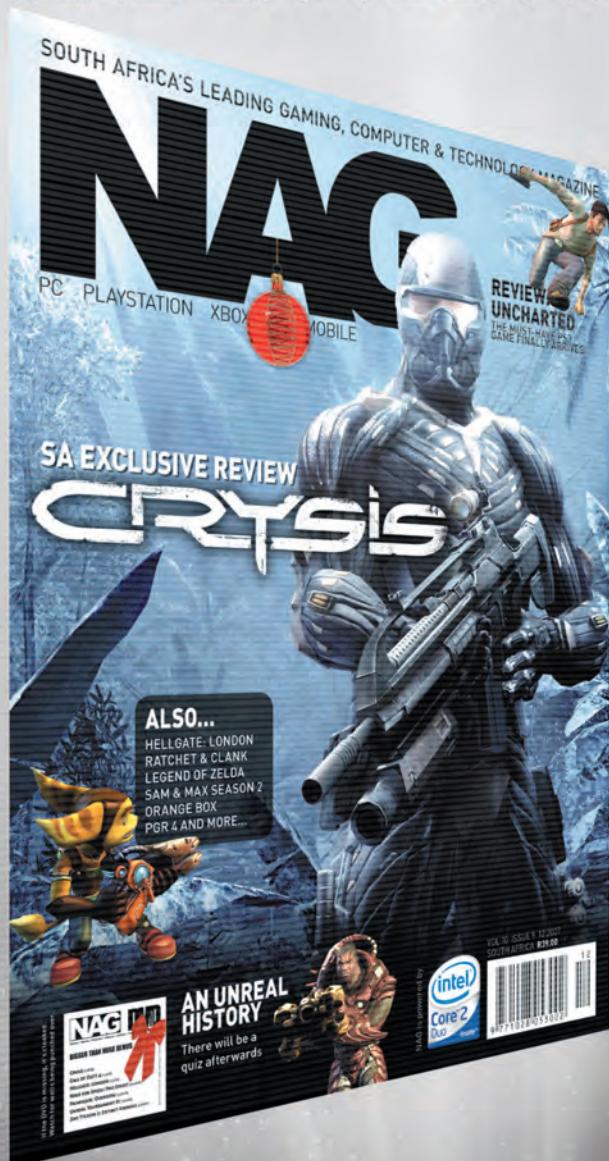
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## GROUND ZERO

by Toby Hudon

# WHY IS IT SO HARD TO GET GOOD GAMES FOR THE PS3?

**Y**OU MAY RECALL LAST month's column where I mentioned that the PS3 is difficult to develop for compared to the Xbox 360, resulting in a plethora of substandard games. Actually, I said it was "more akin to herding cats that are on methamphetamine and fire." I should probably explain myself, lest I sound like I have something against the PS3. This is of course, not true. I have nothing against the PS3. I have everything against stupidity, especially when that stupidity results in bad games.

Now, I'm sure somewhere people are up in arms going, "But the PS3 has Cell and it is the ultimate CPU!" and such. I know about Cell. You may recall our preview of Cell and its design from a few years ago. I'm well aware that Cell has one PPE with 512KB L2 cache and eight SPEs, one of which is disabled to improve yields at 3.2GHz. The Xbox 360, in contrast, has a tri-core CPU, also at 3.2GHz. So why exactly are seven cores losing to three? It's kind of like having two sports cars. One has three gears, and can do 200km/h. The other has seven gears, and can do 300km/h. However, second gear kicks in when the speedometer hits 150km/h, so if you're on anything with a curve, you're stuck in first gear. Let's look at what's going on here.

Firstly, the SPEs (Synergistic Processing Elements – great name there guys!) aren't really full-fledged CPUs. They're kind of a middle ground between a modern programmable shader GPU like the GeForce 8800 series or AMD/ATI 3800 series. And you know what they say about a jack-of-all-trades. They can each do two instructions at a time, but only have about 256KB of RAM to work with. In addition, they don't really handle their own memory management. The PPE (Power Processing Element), which oversees the Cell, has to do most of the grunt work coordinating data to be worked on moving in and out of each SPE. This means the SPEs can be more specialised for computing speed, and you can do neat things like chain them. However, it also makes memory management a pain in the ass. Also, 256KB is a bit cramped for some algorithms like, say, collision detection.

Here's another nifty titbit. The PPE and the CPU in the 360 are essentially the same PowerPC core. They both run at 3.2GHz. However, the 360's core was tweaked a bit with more registers and some better SIMD FPU extensions (think SSE). Since the Cell does most of the heavy FPU work in the SPEs, this didn't seem like a problem at the time. But it means that if you can't get the SPEs doing your work, then there's no way in hell you'll catch up with the 360's CPU power – even on single-threaded code. Trying to multithread algorithms is like trying to drive on a winding mountain road at high speed – it takes some serious skill to make use of a powerful engine, and this is Cell's Achilles' heel.

Then there are the GPUs. The 360 has a DirectX 9.5 part that's a cross between a Radeon x1900 and x2600. It also has a really fast eDRAM cache that can move data at 256GB/sec internally. How useful is that? Very – for a few specific uses such as z-buffering and antialiasing. As for the RSX chip in the PS3, I can't confirm it but it's a desperate move. It seems a bit odd that NVIDIA would throw an already released GeForce 7900-based chip into a next-gen console when AMD/ATI managed to one up that a year earlier. I suspect that the original chip designed for the PS3 had issues and that at the last minute it was changed. (This is bad news because it means that the GPU is about half a generation older than the 360's, and lacks some important features like unified shaders.) Then there's the fun GeForce 7 antialiasing and HDR issue, which I hear has been solved, but possibly not so elegantly or efficiently as some would like us to believe. We certainly seem to be seeing better antialiasing on 360 games.

The memory is also an issue. The main part is a 256MB/256MB hard split vs. 512MB unified. On the split memory design, keeping things balanced to prevent a bottleneck is trickier – hence the issues with *Oblivion* not being able to use all the extras on the PS3 at the same time. You might also think that the bandwidth advantage of the 3.2GHz Rambus XDR on the PS3 would show over the 700MHz GDDR3 on the 360, but in reality latency matters for much more, and the eDRAM just runs circles around anything else in that category.

The real killer is the development platform. MS has years of experience with Visual Studio, and I'm told by those working with it that developing for the 360 is as simple as developing for the PC and then ticking a checkbox marked "compile for 360". However, the PS3's development is a nightmare. Nothing is automated, down to the SPE memory management. If you cannot manually thread and optimise your code to get it spanned across the PPE and six SPEs (#7 is reserved for the OS), you fall back to a single in-order core with outdated SIMD extensions. And the GPU is not going to bail you out with some fancy GP-GPU tricks a unified shader system can pull off, even if you could convince it to touch system memory at more than a snail's pace.

So, when you see a game like *skate.*, which runs great on the 360 but frame drops to hell on the PS3, chances are that they just cannot get the code working efficiently on the system. Moreover, without advanced developing and debugging tools, it's much harder to fix. This isn't really the fault of the developers, though developers who spend more time optimising can probably squeeze more out of Cell than the Xenon... eventually. However, by then we'll probably already be looking at the next generation of consoles. **NAG**



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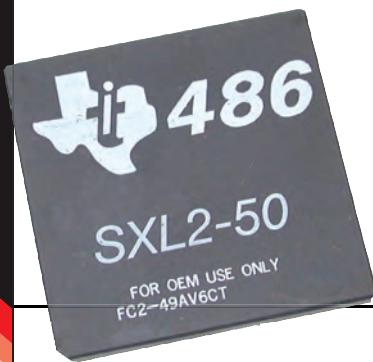
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## HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

# IDIOTS AND FANATICS

**B**ETWEEN MID-2001 AND EARLY 2004, a great number of gamers and enthusiasts were at each other's throats, trying their utmost to convince each other that their chosen graphics card was better than the competition's. NVIDIA's ill-fated GeForce FX was up against the fantastic AMD/ATI Radeon 9700. There were forums and Websites that attempted a neutral stand, but the truth is, being neutral was almost impossible when each side would lie and vary times. Truths, half-truths, outright misdirection; it was all there. Few soap operas could have matched the drama that took place on the Web almost every day.

Forums had multiple topics, which eventually became the same topic. People were banned and it is said that some people even had fistfights. During the early days of this war, 'NVIdiots' and 'fanATIcs' were born. These names were given to those who would defend their chosen IHV without question or any doubt whatsoever. ATI's cheating in *Quake III Arena* was constantly brought up when morality was levelled at NVIDIA's questionable clip plane issue in 3DMark03.

"The way it's meant to be cheated," was the line used by fanATIcs against the NVIdiots. No argument was ever won. If at any point you thought that the debate between AMD and Intel was the most prevalent within these circles, you would be wrong. It was as if the users were mimicking the quick refresh cycles of the actual hardware, which changed every six months. This feud reached a peak very quickly and died down just as quickly in 2004 when the new generation of graphics cards appeared.

This may have seemed like a 'bad' time, but it most certainly was not. The arguments, the FUD and the accusations, while in themselves not good for anybody, indicated a competitive market, which is not

necessarily the case today. What we have now is an almost lopsided industry. It is understood that what we previously thought were alliances between IHVs no longer hold true. Despite what the people from marketing try and tell us, we are not blind. We can see the options diminishing with every release cycle and it is now not difficult to find everybody on a single forum agreeing.

You will find no wars where people ridicule NVIDIA's "The Way It's Meant To Be Played" programme; you will not find anyone mentioning what a catastrophic failure ATI's "Get in the Game" programme was. It has disappeared silently, almost as if people's spirits have been defeated. There was a time when one could say, "If you want ultimate game performance, you should buy an AMD machine with an NVIDIA graphics card." If you wanted to compete for top honours in benchmarks, you should get an ATI card with an Intel CPU. It was easy to say this but you could spend hours debating it with others online.

However, a few short years later and there is no buzz on the Internet; no polarisation of any kind, and no passion for any IHV's products. It just isn't there. The components are many times more powerful and cost more than they did at any other time, but the same brand loyalty, which was so prevalent at the time, is no longer there. We still have our preferences, but almost no one is trying to convince anyone about any single hardware component except for saying, "It sucks so much dude, the other one is better." The only thing that will change that and re-ignite the loyalty that we as end-users had before is decent competition amongst the IHVs – something that has certainly not happened in a very long time. **NAG**



# 2008

**happy new year**



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# THE HISTORY OF DIRECTX PART 1

IF THERE IS ONE CONSTANT IN THE FAST-PACED GAMING WORLD, WHERE GRAPHICS CARDS ARE OBSOLETE BEFORE YOU GET THEM AND NEW GAMES APPEAR EVERY DAY, IT'S DIRECTX. MICROSOFT'S GAME-CENTRIC API HAS COME TO DOMINATE OLDER RIVALS SUCH AS OPENGL AND GLIDE. VISTA HAS INTRODUCED THE NEWEST REVISION, DIRECTX 10, MUCH TO THE DISMAY OF WINDOWS XP FANS. WE'LL SPEND A FEW ISSUES DELVING INTO THE HISTORY OF DIRECTX, MOSTLY FOCUSING ON DIRECT3D, TO SEE HOW FAR WE'VE COME SINCE THE EARLY DAYS OF GAMING ON WINDOWS.

by Toby Hudon

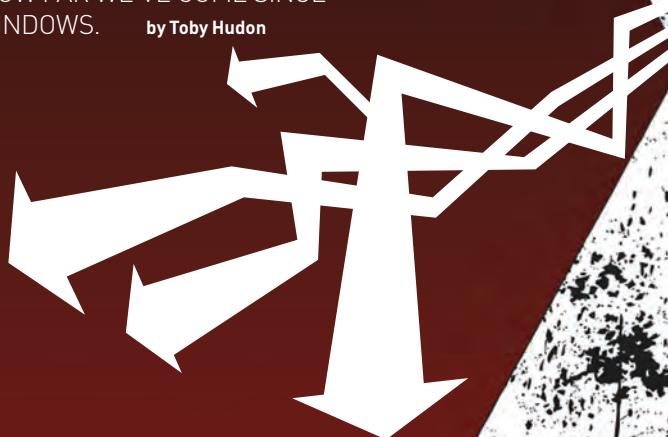
## DIRECTX 1.0

These days, DirectX is almost synonymous with Direct3D, but the first version didn't support 3D acceleration, which was only introduced with version 3.0. The first version of DirectX was designed to try and get DOS game developers to consider Windows 95 as more than a joke, unlike Windows 3.x, which already had a less than stellar reputation among gamers.

The main advantage DOS had that kept game developers sticking to it like glue was the ability to directly access hardware. Windows, and particularly Windows 95, used protected memory modes and multitasking. In November 1994, three Microsoft employees, Craig Eisler, Alex St. John, and Eric Engstrom, speculated whether there was a way to give game programmers the kind of access they wanted from within Windows so that games could be developed for the new OS.

The project was quickly given the go-ahead, and work started in late December 1994. This meant a non-stop rush to make it in time for the Computer Game Developers' Conference in April. A working (albeit on only one hardware configuration) Beta was finished barely in time, and some high-speed driving was required to get the CDs to reproduction in time.

The name of the API was actually coined by reporters writing about the event. The three components of the API were DirectDraw, DirectPlay and DirectSound. Afterwards, a member of the press referred to it as "Direct X" and it stuck. The team was careful to avoid any affiliation with the word "Multimedia," which had already acquired a bad reputation on Windows. The final working 1.0 code was released in September 1995.



### DIRECTX 2.0

Graphics card vendors such as ATI, S3 and Cirrus Logic were quite happy to have something that took advantage of their high-powered hardware. Game developers were also quite impressed with DirectDraw's ability to deliver refresh rate speeds under Windows, and began taking the young Windows 95 a bit more seriously. Work began to steamroll ahead with DirectX 2.0 right away.

Version 2.0 mainly fixed bugs and cleaned things up, and shipped with the OSR2 release of Windows 95, which was the de facto version installed on most PCs built around that time. DirectX 2.0 shipped on 5 June 1996, but was quickly superseded by DirectX 3.0 on 12 September (or August the 43<sup>rd</sup>, since Eric Engstrom had promised it "in August").

There is some debate online over whether Direct3D first appeared in version 2.0 or 3.0. Microsoft's official description of DirectX 2.0 mentions it, but Craig Eisler states on his blog that it first appeared in version 3.0. Given the close release dates of the two versions, it's a moot point anyway.

### DIRECTX 3.0

Version 3.0 officially supported Direct3D. The technology actually came from a company called RenderMorphics, which Microsoft had acquired in 1995. Their main product was an API called Reality Lab, which was actually a tile-based renderer that ran acceptably in software on CPUs at the time. It was a competitor of other 3D middleware like RenderWare and BRender. After being bought by Microsoft, it was rebuilt into Direct3D with two versions: the Immediate Mode version, which was for high-speed apps like gaming; and the Retained Mode, which was slower and aimed at applications like CAD. The RM version eventually became obsolete as nobody really adopted it.

The first version of Direct3D actually had quite a list of features. Microsoft's description of it is as follows:

*"Direct3D is a complete set of real-time 3D graphics services that delivers fast software-based rendering of the full 3D rendering pipeline (transformations, lighting, and rasterisation) and transparent access to hardware acceleration. Direct3D is fully scalable, enabling all or part of the 3D rendering pipeline to be accelerated by hardware. Direct3D exposes advanced graphics capabilities of 3D hardware accelerators, including z-buffering, antialiasing, alpha blending, mipmapping, atmospheric effects, and perspective-correct texture mapping. Integration with other DirectX technologies enables Direct3D to deliver such features as video mapping, hardware 3D rendering in 2D overlay planes, and even sprites, providing use of 2D and 3D graphics in interactive media titles."*



told the game developer community about DirectX 5 that was targeting summer of 1997, and so we decided to simply skip DirectX 4 rather than confuse people. DirectX 5 shipped on July 16, 1997 - and to this day, people ponder about what happened to DirectX 4. So much for avoiding confusion."

He also provides a link to an amusing discussion by Raymond Chen about the justification of why DX4 was cancelled outright rather than have 5.0 renamed to 4.0:

#### **"WHAT HAPPENED TO DIRECTX 4?"**

*If you go through the history of DirectX, you'll see that there is no DirectX 4. It went from DirectX 3 straight to DirectX 5. What's up with that?*

*After DirectX 3 was released, development on two successor products took place simultaneously: a shorter-term release called DirectX 4 and a more substantial long-term release called DirectX 5.*

*But based on the feedback we were getting from the game development community, they didn't really care about the small features in DirectX 4; what they were much more interested in were the features of DirectX 5. So, it was decided to cancel DirectX 4 and roll all of its features into DirectX 5.*

#### **SO WHY WASN'T DIRECTX 5 RENAMED TO DIRECTX 4?**

*Because there were already hundreds upon hundreds of documents that referred to the two projects as DirectX 4 and DirectX 5. Documents that said things like, 'Feature XYZ will not appear until DirectX 5'. Changing the name of the projects mid-cycle was going to create even more confusion. You would end up with headlines like, 'Microsoft removes DirectX 5 from the table - kiss goodbye to feature XYZ' and conversations reminiscent of 'Who's on First'.*

*'I have some e-mail from you saying that feature ABC won't be ready until DirectX 5. When do you plan on releasing DirectX 5?'*

*'We haven't even started planning DirectX 5; we're completely focused on DirectX 4, which we hope to have ready by late spring.'*

*'But I need feature XYZ and you said that wouldn't be ready until DirectX 5.'*

*'Oh, that e-mail was written two weeks ago. Since then, DirectX 5 was renamed to DirectX 4, and DirectX 4 was cancelled.'*

*'So, when I have a letter from you talking about DirectX 5, I should pretend it says DirectX 4, and when it says DirectX 4, I should pretend it says a project that has since been cancelled.'*

*'Right, but check the date at the top of the letter, because if it's newer than last week, then when it says DirectX 4, it really means the new DirectX 4.'*

*'And what if it says DirectX 5?'*

*'Then somebody screwed up and didn't get*

the memo.'

'Okay, thanks. Clear as mud.'

### DIRECTX 5.0

The fifth iteration of DirectX is where it really began to shine. The first versions were always a bit rocky, but version 5.0 is where a bit of stability was gained, and D3D began to be seen as a serious API for games, rather than a poor wannabe competitor to OpenGL.

This of course led to a direct competition between D3D and OpenGL, despite Microsoft's protests that there was room for coexistence. Many gamers and developers lined up on one side or the other to fight what was essentially a frivolous battle. There were arguments for both APIs, and each camp claimed their side was superior. OpenGL had the ability to use extensions for specific cards, but required a hard drive to write on Installable Client Driver (ICD) to properly work with most cards, which was harder than most D3D drivers were. This led to OpenGL Miniports like the one for GLQuake, which was a subset of the full ICD driver that let a game run, but was very limited and usually only worked for a few games.

Some new improvements around this time were better usability with easier-to-understand functions like DrawPrimitive. This made the newer revisions of Direct3D much easier to work with than the previous model from DX3.0.

### DIRECTX 6.0

Despite claims of peaceful coexistence, Microsoft began to aggressively improve the features of Direct3D and the rest of the DirectX suite. DirectShow incorporated features such as hardware support for motion compensation - an intensive part of MPEG encoding and decoding that greatly benefited from hardware acceleration. In addition, hardware deinterlacing and better control over things like gamma levels were added.

As for Direct3D, with version 6.0, new features were added. Multitexture support, popularised by the 3dfx Voodoo2, became standard. Bump mapping from Tritech was added. S3 provided the infamous S3 Texture Compression, renamed DXTC for DirectX Texture Compression. By forcing these features into the API rather than allowing them ad hoc by extensions like OpenGL, Microsoft began to exert pressure on the 3D card industry to standardise and rapidly add features.

Interestingly, many of these features like bump mapping were relatively unpopular, because the cards just weren't fast enough to handle them. Multitexturing was a big improvement, but for some time it was texture fillrate that improved image quality in games than any particular new feature. This was because many developers had a laundry list of "If only we had the speed" wishes, and the rapidly increasing performance of the consumer 3D card market was driving image quality even more than the additional feature changes.

### DIRECTX 7.0

With DX7, D3D finally began to pull away from OpenGL and became the dominant 3D API on the PC. Despite protests over Microsoft's "Embrace, Extend, Extinguish" tactics, which many claimed were to eliminate competition, it was more due to

the OpenGL committee's dithering and slow adoption of new features as standard rather than vendor-specific extensions. This led to OpenGL being more difficult to develop for by developers with fewer resources, since to look good games needed to handle each OpenGL card differently.

The features that version 7.0 added were also quite useful. The biggest one was support for hardware Transform and Lighting (T&L), which NVIDIA pushed for with its GeForce card. This led to a drastic reduction in the amount of CPU speed and memory bandwidth needed for rendering 3D geometry, as a lot of time-saving work such as backface culling and hidden surface removal (removing polygons that won't be seen) could be done in hardware, saving CPU time and not wasting precious video memory bandwidth on drawing redundant polygons.

Direct3D in DX7 was the last fixed-function pipeline 3D API in the series. After this, it was all about shaders.

### NEXT MONTH

Next month we'll take a look at the much more complex shader-based APIs and the shader models. So, stay tuned for DirectX 8 through 10. **NAG**





## ASUS EN8800GT

**F**EW GRAPHICS CARDS HAVE been greeted with as much enthusiasm by users as the GeForce 6600GT, which was released way back in 2004. The price/performance ratio was incredible and even though end-users were looking at it and comparing it to the questionable GeForce FX line, it didn't take a genius to figure out that the NV43 was, in terms of bang for buck, the best graphics card we had at that stage - maybe even better than the GeForce4 4200 of early 2001.

These great graphics are usually released some time after the high-end parts they are based on. The excitement that usually follows a successful high-end graphics card launch is still there, and the success of these parts rests entirely on how similar they are in performance to their usually steeply priced high-end variants. Usually, half the performance of the high-end part is considered good, and if the graphics card can deliver three quarters of the performance, it's considered great. After all, these cards are usually half the price, if not less.

Easier on our pockets, but still packing plenty of performance is what it's ultimately about. A mere fourteen months ago, NVIDIA released the much-awaited G80-based graphics cards. It was almost unreal witnessing not only the image quality that the new parts offered, but more importantly the performance. Prices were steep, the cards ran hot, and they ushered in a new era where a 500W PSU was not enough to power a system anymore. With the 8800GT, it seems that

NVIDIA has redefined what we should expect from a mid-range graphics card. Compared to the disaster that was the 8600 range, the 8800GT is literally in a class of its own.

We thought it couldn't be possible, but the 8800GT, costing half the price of an 8800GTX, is sometimes faster. Yes, for the owners of 24-inch monitors and those who want plenty of AA, the GTX is still the card to go for. However, for the rest of us, the 8800GT is the card to have. When we first received the ASUS EN8800GT, we knew it would be faster than the 8600GT and possibly match the 8800GTS 640MB, but the EN8800GT did more than that. In 3DMark05, it outpaced an overclocked GeForce 8800Ultra and the HD 2900 XT, which used to rule this specific benchmark with an iron fist. In 3DMark06, the 8800GT was close to the 8800Ultra, falling short by less than 800 points (which isn't a lot considering that it was up against an 8800Ultra operating at a 702MHz core and 2.4GHz on the memory).

The 8800GT, besides being fast, is smaller and cheaper too. What may come as a surprise to some is that the GPU itself is packed with more than 50 million additional transistors than the G80 core. NVIDIA integrated the NVIO chip into the same package as the rest of the core. The rest of the card sports video processing silicon that was previously only available in the 8600 range. Despite a sizeably larger die, the core itself is actually cooler than the previous G80. However, given the single-slot cooling of the



### SPECS

<b>CORE</b>	G92 [D9P]
<b>PROCESS</b>	TSMC 65nm
<b>CORE CLOCK</b>	600MHz
<b>MEMORY</b>	256-bit [4 x 64-bit] 1ns Qimonda GDDR3 (900MHz/ 1.8GHz DDR)
<b>PIPELINES</b>	112 (28 texture samplers/24 ROPS)
<b>FEATURES</b>	DirectX 10, OpenGL 2.1

### SCORE



card, you may find yourself with a graphics card operating at 85°C under load. This is the only fault we could find with the ASUS EN8800GT (and all other 8800GT cards based on the reference design).

If you are looking for spectacular performance, but are not willing to pay the crazy prices of 8800GTX, then the 8800GT is for you. The inclusion of *Company of Heroes* with the ASUS EN8800GT makes the deal even sweeter. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

# EVGA E-GEFORCE 8800ULTRA SUPERCLOCKED

**NOT EVERYONE HAS THE** courage or the patience to fiddle with arcane settings while praying hardware doesn't overheat or lock up. Fortunately, for those who can afford it, throwing money at it can solve this problem.

EVGA is a fairly popular brand overseas, despite being relatively new to the South African market. Therefore, there's no reason to be wary of the unfamiliar make - they have a solid reputation on other shores. One of their main product lines is the Superclocked series of cards, which have the overclocking done for you.

The hardcore enthusiast may scoff at the idea of paying for a pre-overclocked part that achieves roughly what you could with the standard one and some time, but some people would rather pay for the convenience and assurance of stability. We found that EVGA has done a good job in this regard. The card has very little headroom left for further overclocking, but is stable, providing more than reasonable overclocked values (considering the standard air cooler it employs). The card features a 667MHz core, 1,667MHz shader, and 2,300MHz (1,150 DDR) memory, up from the stock Ultra values of 612, 1,500, and 2,160 respectively. What is left to tweak out of it past this point without resorting to a new cooler or warranty-voiding mods isn't really worth mentioning.

The performance is about what you'd expect of a R9,000 graphics card. *Crysis* runs at well over 30fps at 1,280 x 1,024 with all details set to high and 4x AA enabled. 3DMark shader scores are in the 5,200 and 5,800 ranges for 2.0 and 3.0 shader tests. The only downside is that this is a R9,000 graphics card. These days, R9,000 will buy you two 8800GTs, each of which is almost as fast, plus an SLI motherboard and a quad-core CPU... with some change left. **NAG**

Toby Hudon

## SPECS

<b>GPU</b>	G80
<b>CORE CLOCK</b>	667MHz
<b>SHADER VERSION</b>	4.0
<b>PIPELINES</b>	128
<b>VIDEO MEMORY</b>	768MB
<b>MEMORY CLOCK</b>	2,300MHz
<b>MEMORY BUS</b>	384-bit

## SCORE



## HARDWARE

RRP → R8,700 | Supplier → FoxComp | Website → [www.foxcomp.co.za](http://www.foxcomp.co.za) | Brand → EVGA



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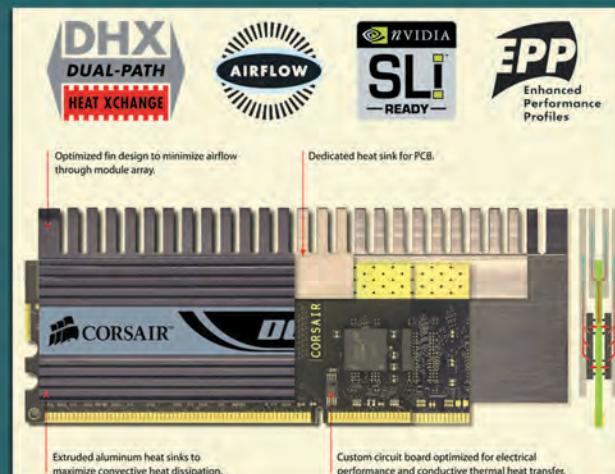
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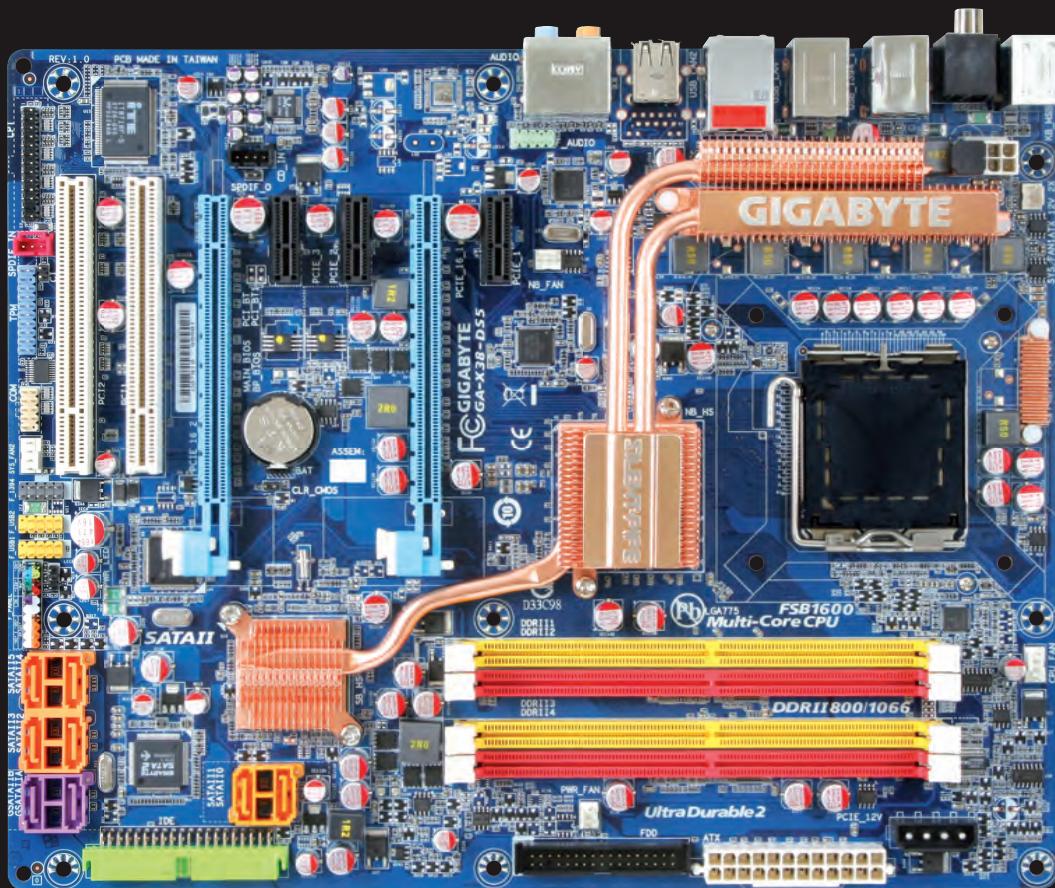


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## GIGABYTE GA-X38-DS5

**S**O, THE X38 CHIPSET has been a disappointment. We have not tested a single X38 board that was better than its P35 equivalent, save for the CrossFire performance. If you are among the millions of people who only have one graphics card, then the X38 chipset is meaningless to you.

Besides official support for 400MHz (SDR) FSB CPUs, the X38 chipset features two full-speed PCI-E 2.0 x16 lanes, which makes it potentially faster than the P35 in CrossFire configurations. In single graphics card solutions, it should be slightly faster with PCI-E 2.0-supporting graphics cards – at least in theory. Fitted with an 8800GT, the GIGABYTE GA-X38-DS5 was faster than the GIGABYTE GA-P35-DQ6, even though the advantage was slight. The X38 also performed better in 3DMark03 and 3DMark06. However, in 3DMark 2001 SE and 3DMark05, which are seemingly more sensitive to chipset differences, the P35 board was quicker. This was easy to see why. Making use of the latest MemSet Beta, the P35-based GIGABYTE board consistently provided better sub-timings and a much better performance than the X38-DS5.

Unfortunately, we were not able to test CrossFire performance, but from what we have observed with the single 8800GT graphics card, we assume that the X38-DS5 would be faster than the P35-based board by a sizeable margin.

In the GA-X38-DS5, GIGABYTE has produced a very good motherboard, which will appeal to casual gamers and enthusiasts alike. The build quality of the board is worth mentioning, as it is a vast improvement over GIGABYTE motherboards of old. The use of solid capacitors by a number of manufacturers is worth celebrating, and GIGABYTE has taken this further by providing enhanced SMD solid capacitors. While other manufacturers make

use of eight-phase power designs, on the X38-DQ6, GIGABYTE makes use of a twelve-phase power design. However, on the X38-DS5 this is substituted with the 'regular' eight-phase design, which is for the most part just as efficient (only under the most extreme cases would you notice the advantages the twelve-phase design offers over the eight-phase design).

The DS5 makes use of DDR2, but adds support for DDR2-1200, which is not official but helps if you have high-speed RAM and you're running a high FSB that will benefit from the high-speed RAM (or if you just want to run your RAM at its rated speed without overclocking the motherboard). Having said that, it is worth noting that running a 266MHz (SDR) Core 2 CPU with your RAM at 1,200MHz will yield no performance gain over running your RAM at 1,066MHz or 800MHz. This is because the FSB is the bottleneck, and herein lays the problem of recommending the X38-DS5 as a worthwhile upgrade to the P35-DS3R for instance. Yes, the DS5 is more enthusiast-friendly and is a better board in terms of features in every respect, but the DS3R has a higher FSB than the DS5. The FSB limitation on the DS5 is not GIGABYTE's fault, but the X38 chipset's. It just doesn't overclock as high as the P35, and as a result, the DDR2-1200 support becomes more cosmetic rather than functional. Because the X38 is a newer chipset than the P35, it will support the QX9770. While the P35 board may support it as well, it's unlikely that it will be able to clock it as high as the X38-based DS5 is able to.

However, none of the above matters, as the X38-DS5 is an excellent board. For one, it uses DDR2, which makes it much cheaper to own than the DDR3 variant (which requires one to invest in hideously expensive DDR3 RAM). GIGABYTE, not satisfied with the regular ALC888 eight-channel controller, has gone with the superior ALC889A

### SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel X38
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR2 184-pin (Max. 8GB)
CPU SUPPORT	Intel Pentium 4 D, Core 2, Core 2 Extreme, Core 2 Quad
SLOTS	2 x PCI-E x16 3 x PCI-E x1 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	8 x SATA 3Gb/sec 6 x USB 2.0 Gigabit Ethernet 1 x FireWire 2 x eSATA

### SCORE



with DTS support. This may be a small difference to some, but it does actually sound better and obviously has better features than the other audio controller. All these things help make the DS5 a solid board with stable power delivery, seemingly great performance in CrossFire, and a number of GIGABYTE regulars such as Dual BIOS and a BIOS that allows you to save up to ten different configurations.

GIGABYTE has once again produced a good board that may not be the best, but does stand out from the rest and is most certainly worth a look at (especially if you're still using an i975- or i965-based motherboard and are considering upgrading to the newer 333MHz CPUs). **NAG**

**Neo Sibeko**

# THERMALRIGHT HR-03

**R**EPLACING THE STANDARD COOLER fitted to your new, pricey graphics card can be an experience fraught with uncertainty. Will the new cooler work better than the stock one supplied, and will the graphics card continue to work after the surgery? The answer to both can be an extremely disappointing "No."

However, there are manufacturers who are recognised as outstanding in this field. Zalman is the first, with its GPU coolers being popular among gamers in particular, with Thermalright hot on their heels in terms of market popularity. On test here is Thermalright's HR-03 GPU cooler; an older product and therefore not usable with 8800-series NVIDIA or 2900-series AMD/ATI cards. Fortunately, we still had an older Sapphire X1900 Pro PCI-E graphics card around to try the unit out on.

The HR-03 is a rather hefty affair featuring four heat pipes running from the contact plate out into the large aluminium heatsink arrangement, with the outermost pair then also curling back upon themselves to run through the heatsink fins once again. There are two ways to install the unit: either simply stuck onto the front of the card or curling over the top of the PCB so that the heatsink arrangement actually hovers above the rear face of the board. We applied it using the former method, and like this and with the recommended 90mm fan affixed, it used many expansion slots!

You can also run the HR-03 without the fan in passive mode, the benefit of which is, obviously, zero-noise operation. It works all right like this, but under extended 3D load, passive cooling is always likely to collapse, and the HR-03 is no exception.



## SPECS

<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	133mm x 156mm x 38mm
<b>WEIGHT</b>	350g
<b>COOLING MECHANISM</b>	Four heat pipes, aluminium fins
<b>COMPATIBILITY</b>	NVIDIA Quadro FX (all), 6800, 7600, 7800, 7900, 7950GT, 8600GT AMD/ATI X700 – X850, X1600, X1650, X1800, X1900, X2600

**Test Platform:** ASUS 8800GTS 640MB graphics card, Intel Q6600 CPU running at 3GHz, Intel 975XB2 MOBO, 2GB DDR2 1,000MHz, Windows Vista with Catalyst 7.11

## SCORE



## HARDWARE

RRP → R490 | Supplier → Frontosa | Website → [www.thermalright.com](http://www.thermalright.com) | Brand → Thermalright

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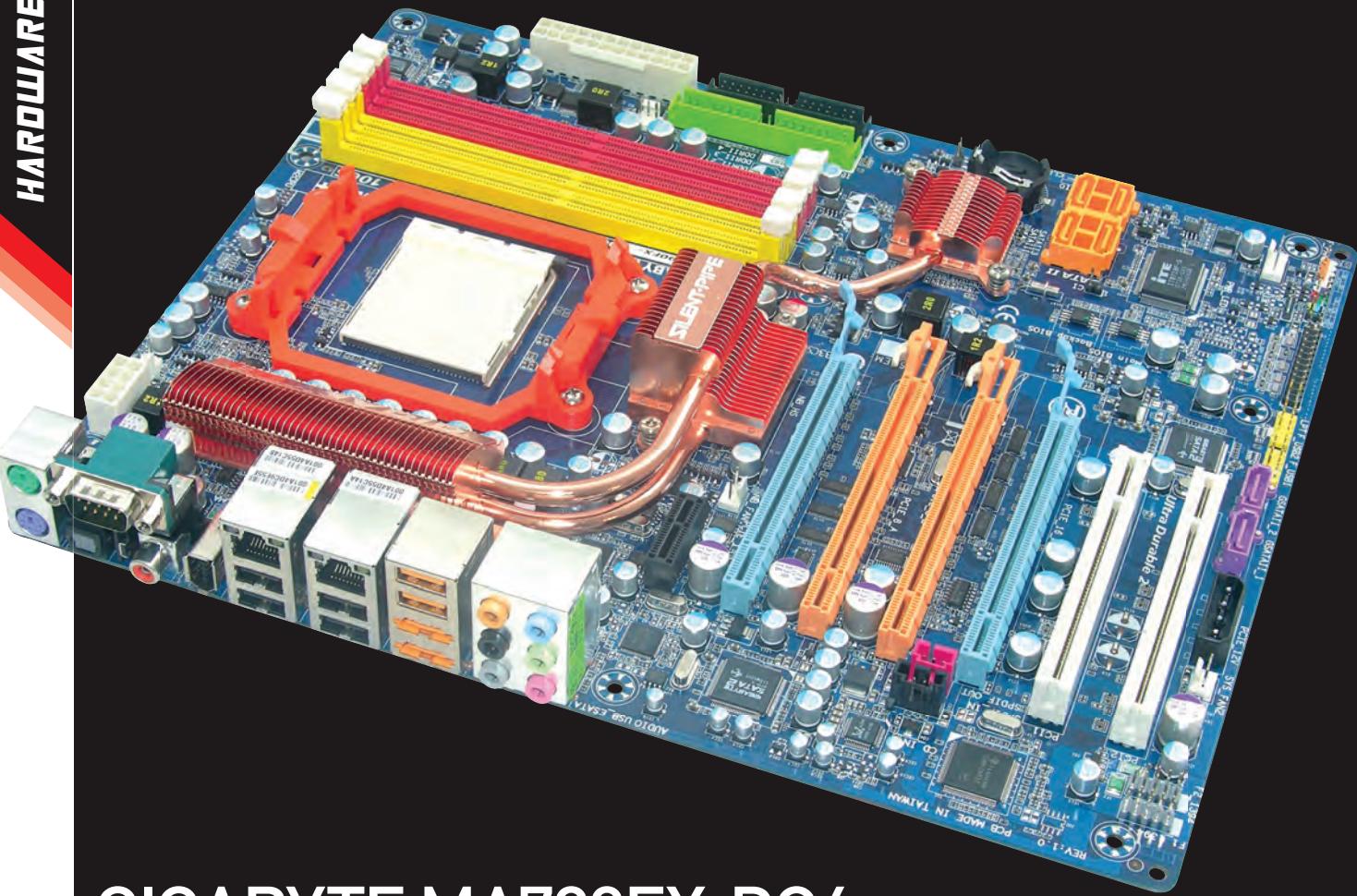
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32KB Razer Synapse™ onboard memory  
Nine programmable Hyperesponse™ buttons  
1000Hz Ultrapolling / 1ms response time  
On-The-Fly Sensitivity™ adjustment  
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## GIGABYTE MA790FX-DQ6

THE LAST 18 MONTHS or so have been difficult for AMD. The acquisition of ATI was obviously not cheap and recent quarterly reports reflect this. Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that AMD hasn't produced useful products since the acquisition of ATI. In fact, with the 790FX, AMD has produced a chipset that is probably the best yet for the AM2/AM2+ platform, although the NVIDIA nForce 590 SLI chipset is slightly faster especially in bandwidth tests.

However, what the 790FX chipset brings with it is the ability to run up to four graphics cards in a CrossFire configuration. That's right; the 790FX supports two full-speed PCI-E 2.0 x16 lanes for a regular CrossFire configuration or four half-speed PCI-E x8 lanes for quad CrossFire. Granted, you're unlikely to ever make use of four graphics cards, but for those who only want the fastest configurations available, this is the platform to have for graphics-intensive games.

Obviously, a four-way CrossFire configuration requires that you make use of single-slot cards such as the HD3850 or HD3870 as there's no way four HD2900 cards will fit on an ATX motherboard. Should you be in possession of four of these cards, in future you will be able to make use of all of them to play at the highest resolutions with the highest image quality and framerates.

The 790FX chipset, however, brings more than this to the table. More than anything, it provides increased speeds and compatibility with the AMD Phenom range of processors, which benefit from the new HyperTransport 3.0 link (which is only available on AM2+ CPUs

and supporting chipsets). What makes the AM2+ motherboards and CPUs good – besides the increased performance over the Athlon 64 and the original AM2 platform – is that the chipset supports the older Athlon 64 X2 and Athlon FX CPUs. This is great for those who are not quite ready to buy the new CPUs, but who want a motherboard that can help extract maximum performance from their CPUs.

The MA790FX makes use of DDR2 memory, which is a blessing for many because DDR3 costs far more than many would presently like to pay for high-speed RAM. All of this makes upgrading to the new AM2+ platform quite easy and relatively painless as different parts of the system can be purchased at different times during which one still has a fully functioning system.

However, all of the aforementioned has more to do with the chipset than the actual motherboard brand, and as is the norm, GIGABYTE has produced a fine sample based on the chipset. GIGABYTE uses its much-touted (by the company itself) Ferrite chokes and low ESR solid capacitors. This may not mean much to the average user, but for gamers who overclock their systems and who want reliability and stability, this is a welcome addition as this motherboard will not only overclock better than some other motherboards, but will hopefully last longer.

GIGABYTE has of late been making use of the fantastic ALC889A audio controller, which never ceases to impress with the audio fidelity it delivers compared to the older controllers from Realtek. This is of particular importance to those who watch high-definition content

### SPECS

CHIPSET	AMD 790FX
MEMORY BANKS	4 x DDR2 184-pin [Max. 8GB]
CPU SUPPORT	AMD Phenom FX, Phenom, Athlon 64 FX, Athlon 64 X2, Athlon, Sempron
SLOTS	2 x PCI-E x16 3 x PCI-E x1 2 x PCI 2.2
CONNECTORS	6 x SATA 3Gb/sec 6 x USB 2.0 2 x Gigabit Ethernet 1 x FireWire 2 x eSATA

### SCORE



that has an encoded multi-channel audio stream, as the MA790FX-DQ6 can output a DTS signal to a supporting set of speakers

The MA790FX-DQ6 has a great design, is excellently constructed, has more features than you'd ever need or know what to do with, and great overclocking headroom. If you're considering upgrading to the new AMD AM2+ platform, you are unlikely to find a better motherboard based on the 790FX chipset. **NAG**

**Neo Sibeko**

# THERMALRIGHT HR-03 PLUS

THE HR-03 IMPRESSED US with how it managed to maintain very pleasing temperatures on a last-generation GPU, but it cannot be used with 8800-series cards. Enter the HR-03 Plus...

Essentially, the design is identical, but now features a much larger contact area to accommodate the larger die size of the G80 GPU. This also enables the use of no less than six individual heat pipes rather than the four of the earlier model. While the HR-03 includes stick-on RAM coolers in its nondescript brown packaging, the Plus has a specialised IO cooler for the NVIO chip on the 8800 family, as well as additional stick-on aluminium coolers for the board's on-board power circuitry (MOSFETs).

Installing it is really easy. It requires assembling the back plate - an X-shaped aluminium bracer with a small sponge in the centre to protect the backside of the GPU and board - and securing the chunky heatsink arrangement on the front side of the GPU to this backing plate and the PCB with four thumb-operated bolts with protective rubber grommets.

Our 640MB ASUS 8800GTS cooler is a chunky affair, and after very cautiously removing it from the card and replacing it with the Thermalright, we were ready to run some tests. Thermalright recommends that a 90mm fan be attached when used with an 8800 due to the high temperatures this package reaches, so we did just that. Having already seen the regular HR-03 getting hotter and hotter the longer we gamed, we weren't taking any chances...

Functioning in this configuration, the HR-03 Plus once again exceeded our expectations and proved to be the best

aftermarket GPU cooler we've tested. At idle, our card (with the HR-03 installed) 'heated up' to 47°C (with the stock cooler, the card operated at 58°C). Under load and using ATITool's 3D Cube applet for a good 20 minutes, the stock cooler kept the GPU at a 'sizzling' 86°C. The HR-03 Plus, under the same conditions, kept the GPU at a pleasant 57°C (almost a full 30 degrees lower!).

The HR-03 Plus is well worth the cost. It will ensure optimal cooling of your precious and expensive 8800-series card, making it last longer.

**NAG**

Russell Bennett

## SPECS

<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	133mm x 156mm x 38mm
<b>WEIGHT</b>	410g
<b>COOLING MECHANISM</b>	Six heat pipes, aluminium fins
<b>COMPATIBILITY</b>	NVIDIA GeForce 8800GTX, GTS and Ultra

**Test Platform:** ASUS 8800GTS 640MB graphics card, Intel Q6600 CPU running at 3GHz, Intel 975BX2 MOBO, 2GB DDR2 1,000MHz, Windows Vista with ForceWare 169.12 (Beta)

## SCORE



## HARDWARE

RRP → R586 | Supplier → Frontosa | Website → [www.thermalright.com](http://www.thermalright.com) | Brand → Thermalright

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**IFX-14**  
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Back-side heat pipe Cooler



IFX-14 Heatsink Body

- \* Larger surface area for heat dissipation
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- \* Optional to rotate the heatsink 90 degrees to best fit your system configuration
- \* Multi-platform compatible backplate for installation on vast number and type of motherboard.



Weight: 790g (heatsink only)  
Dimension: L146.2 x W124 x H161 mm (heatsink only)  
Recommended Fan: All 120mm & 140mm Fan

IFX-14 Back-side  
Heat Pipe Cooler

Back-side dual heatpipe heatsink adds additionally cools CPU and also takes care of the heat coming from the back of the motherboard to extend the life expectancy and stability of motherboard



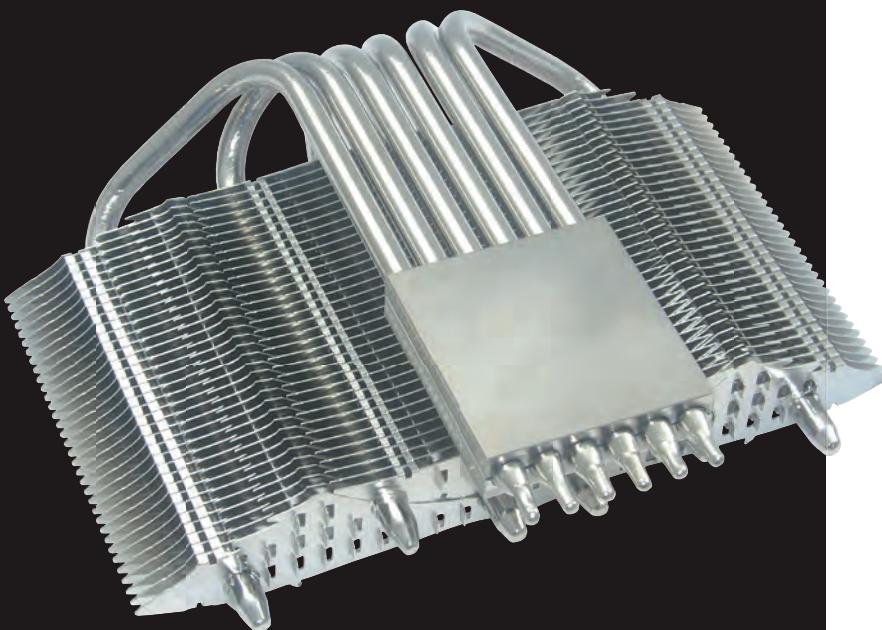
Weight: 130g (heatsink only)  
Recommended Fan: All 80mm & 70mm Fan  
Dimension (heatsink only): L134.5 x W163.5 x H112.6 mm

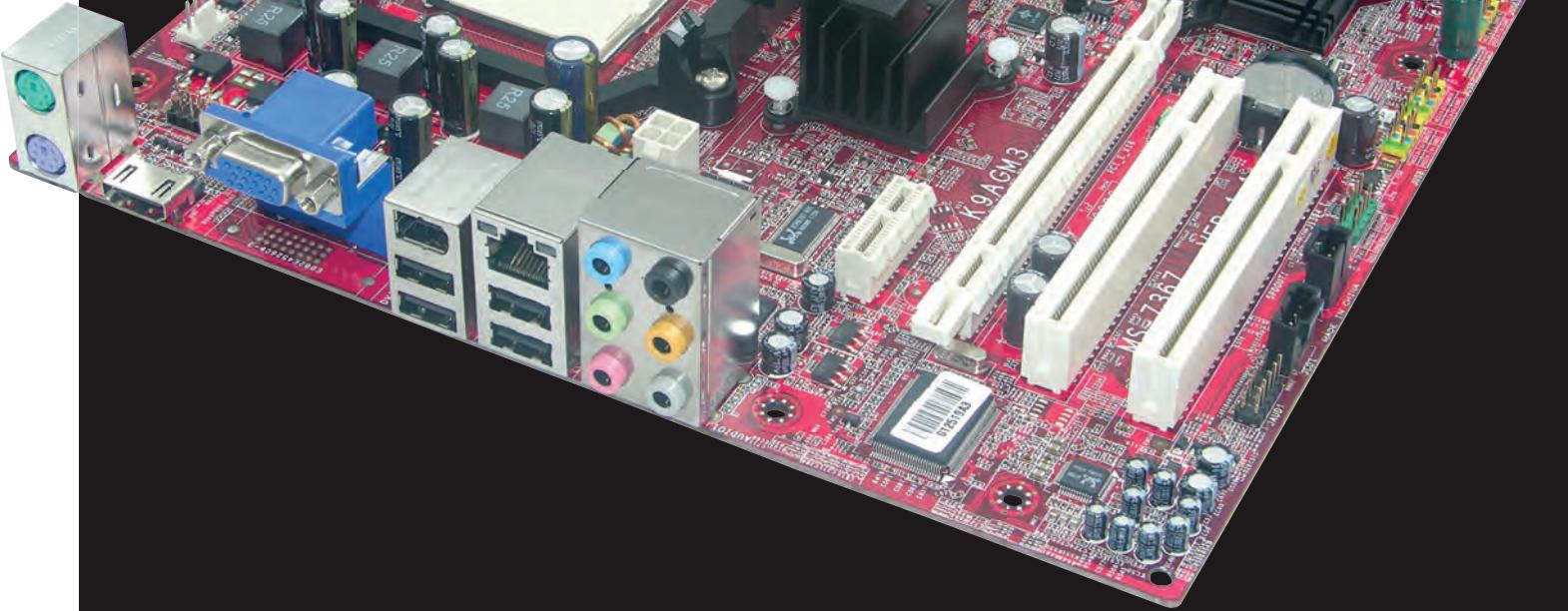


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## MSI K9AGM3-FIH

**H**ERE'S AN INTERESTING FACT for you. By as early as next year, the sale of any digital, non-HD-compliant television will be banned in the US.

While the technology has yet to gain a proper foothold in SA, it's become the de facto standard in more developed areas of the world, which is why media centre-focussed motherboards such as the MSI K9AGM3-FIH are so important. It's not because the AMD 690G chipset is the first chipset launched by the company since its fateful merger with ATI, but because it incorporates an integrated HDMI port.

There's still a single analogue connection, but for viewing HD movies on your new HDCP-capable LCD or plasma TV, an HDMI connector is the only way to go. This interface not only allows the transmission of video at a resolution of 1,920 x 1,080, but also incorporates audio in the same, slim and neat connector, making setting up your media centre an absolute breeze, with minimal cable clutter.

This new chipset incorporates an integrated AMD/ATI X1250 GPU for display purposes, complete with AVIVO technology. It may not

handle 3D gaming too well, but it's certainly strong competition for the NVIDIA 7050PV platform. Besides, there's a PEG slot in case you want to upgrade to a more powerful GPU for gaming purposes (doing so will automatically disable the onboard graphics solution).

The 690G chipset supports all current AMD processors, and the SB600 Southbridge supports up to 10 USB 2.0 ports, four SATA 3Gb/sec channels, integrated Gigabit Ethernet and an eight-channel audio subsystem.

As could be expected from this kind of niche platform, it isn't an enthusiast-orientated offering at all. The BIOS includes almost no overclocking options, although it does incorporate the ability to switch between PAL/NTSC modes quickly (which is a nice feature).

Overall, the new AMD platform performs admirably, easily outpacing the ageing NVIDIA 6100 series and even besting the figures released for the newer 7050 solution in most areas. As an office worker's workstation or media centre platform, the 690G is currently tops. **NAG**

Russell Bennett

### SPECS

CHIPSET	AMD 690G
MEMORY BANKS	2 x 240-pin DDR2 DIMMs (Max. 4GB)
CPU SUPPORT	AMD Athlon 64 X2, Athlon 64, Athlon FX, Sempron
FSB	1,000 MHz
SLOTS	1 x PCI-E x16 1 x PCI-E x1 2 x PCI
CONNECTORS	10 x USB 2.0 1 x FireWire 4 x SATA 3Gb/sec 1 x IDE 1 x Gigabit Ethernet

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# THE NAG FIELD GUIDE TO GAMING

## PART THREE: ACTIVE DUTY

**CONGRATULATIONS, SOLDIER, YOU'RE NEARING** the end of your three-month training! We'll make a Gaming God out of you! Two months ago in Boot Camp you learned the finesse of the super-genres, the giant boxes that help us categorise and quantify all those games out there. That specific skill should come in very handy when making your Want and Do Not Want piles with regards to games that interest you. We also briefly covered the evolution of the Super Soldier project, Mario as well as giving you a visual roadmap of what games may look like in the various super-genres. Last month you went on Patrol Duty and discovered the risky business of smacktalk, interfacing with the natives online as well as gaining an entire industry overview, bringing you up to speed. You're an angel's breath away from attaining your goals! Be strong! Fight the good fight! Gaming is worth it! Say it with me! Gaming is worth it!

And now, LAN parties.

### OKAY SOLDIER, FORM UP! GET ON THE READY LINE! Multiplayer: LAN Parties

Don't worry, it may look complicated from outside but with this quick primer even you will be capable of Active Duty. A LAN party may come in a variety of shapes and sizes: from two-to-four person LANs to huge one-thousand-five-hundred people LANs. A LAN is a Local Area Network, just a fancy way of saying "all these computers are linked and can see each other". Certain games can take advantage of the fact that the computers can see each other, and that's where multiplayer comes in. There is a lot of variety in the exact LAN party poison you may prefer - practically every super-genre has at least one game in the range (or often even one level down the sub-ranges) that allows for multi-person play on a LAN. And so, a LAN party is a group of friends (or strangers, if so organised) getting together, getting their PCs on a network and gaming with each other socially. Ask a tech-savvy friend to help you with getting your PC network-capable and on the network if needed: it's a rite of passage for all gamers to help the newbie. If they don't help, they fail that rite and forfeit future nookie.

You can find listings of LAN parties at [www.langames.co.za](http://www.langames.co.za) (which lists user-submitted entries for LANs over all of South

Africa practically) or at [www.thexboxlounge.co.za](http://www.thexboxlounge.co.za) (for the Xbox 360 flavour of LAN, but PCs are welcome).

First-timers should probably try to get invited to a LAN via friends (nothing wrong with a LAN buddy for safety reasons) or host their own - the equipment is not expensive and help setting up is easily found if you simply ask in the right places.

#### LAN Party Essentials:

First and foremost, the single most important thing: have an antivirus program installed! We cannot stress enough how often people arrive at a LAN party bringing viruses with them, or getting infected by a virus on the network. There are plenty of free antivirus programs (such as Avast, which you can download from [www.avast.com](http://www.avast.com)), so you really have no excuse!

For a PC-based LAN you're going to have to make sure you take your PC, a monitor, a keyboard, a mouse, a mouse-pad, headphones (speakers are frowned upon), power cables for both PC and monitor (often

forgotten), a multi-plug (LAN organisers approve of this), a reinstall kit (your Windows install disc, drivers for everything, software updates, etc) for emergencies and most importantly, games! Yes, you should bring the games you wish to play. If you fear for the security of your precious, put a padlock on a gym-bag or talk to the LAN organiser about storing your games somewhere safe.

**Note:** If you own the games you are bringing, there is nothing wrong with downloading cracks (a piece of software that removes copy protection or disc checking from a game) for the games so they will work without the CD or DVD - we consider this practice perfectly fair, just be sure not to share your games with friends because as much as that promotes the game via word of mouth it is frowned upon by the eyes of the LAW. And you don't want to mess with the LAW. Also, downloading cracks can be risky, as they are often purposefully infected with viruses.

For an Xbox 360 LAN be sure to take your Xbox 360, a monitor/TV, power cables for the



LAN parties may be small, or huge, depending on sponsor participation, exposure as well as organisation. A LAN party requires a sizable amount of hardware for the network as well as solid power for the PCs - the bigger the LAN party, the harder it gets to keep the entire party going without power failures or network problems



360 and screen, headphones (as well as a way to connect them to the Xbox, see the Xbox Lounge forums for more information on this), and of course, games.

Also bring chips and something to drink. The more the better.

### SEE THE WORLD, MAKE NEW FRIENDS, THEN KILL THEM!

#### Online: Massively Multiplayer Online Games

To say that the MMO genre is vast would be an understatement, but as it is still a developing area with regards to local gaming, we're only going to cover the extreme basics. An MMO is a Massively Multiplayer Online Game (also called MMOG or simply MMO). An MMO is capable of supporting hundreds or thousands of players simultaneously, and is played on the Internet by necessity. They may or may not feature a persistent world. MMOs let players cooperate or compete with each other on a grand scale. Many MMOs require substantial investments of time, while others may require a monthly subscription fee.

**Overview and History:** The MMORPG genre pioneered the MMO category, which in turn descended from games such as *Rogue* and *Dungen* which predate the commercial gaming industry. Early MMORPGs were entirely text-based with no visuals and were referred to as MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons). The first graphical MMO was the multi-player flight combat simulation game *Air Warrior* in 1987. The debuts of *The Realm Online*, *Meridian 59*, *Ultima Online* and *Everquest* in the late 1990s created the current MMO boom. Since then, the genre has diversified out of RPG and into practically every other genre. MMOs tend to earn the income per capita of a small country due to their digital (and often virtual) economies.

**Types of MMOs:** MMORPG (role-playing game), MMOPFS (first-person shooter), MMORTS (real-time strategy), MMORG (online rhythm games), MMOMG (online manager games), MMOR (online racing), MMOTG (online tycoon game), MMOSG (online social "game", like *Second Life*), and many others - the MMO genre keeps expanding into new areas all the time, looking for a revenue stream.

You can find out about practically every single MMO out there via the Website [www.mmorpg.com](http://www.mmorpg.com).

**Warning:** The MMO genre often implements an almost drug-dealer like system for getting in new players who are willing to pay the monthly fees the game requires. Most MMO games provide a free trial for a few months, which gives you enough time to try it out, make friends as well as start collecting virtual "stuff". After a while, players may feel obliged to keep playing due to the significant investment that usually goes into playing and enjoying an MMO. As South Africa is very new to the MMO genre, there is the risk of a lot of people getting overly "involved" in an MMO, often resulting in the neglect of friends/family or their own personal lives. Just like gambling, the MMO genre can be very addictive and it falls to us to please remind people that yes, these are just games, but there is nothing wrong with a little moderation. Even the most intelligent of people can fall into the trap of



Johnathan Wendel (born February 26, 1981 in Independence, Missouri), also known by the pseudonym Fatal1ty, is a professional electronic sports player.

feeling obliged (albeit subconsciously) to keep playing a game because all their friends are still playing it, or their "guild" needs them, or they don't want to waste all the time and energy already spent collecting all that virtual "stuff". This is not to say all MMOs are horrible things that should be burned at the stake: just that we feel a certain amount of forewarning could help a lot of people avoid some really silly mistakes (that some of us have already made).

### BE ALL THAT YOU CAN BE! e-Sports: Competitive Gaming

You've probably noticed the boyband-like gamers who move around in flocks, preening at the edges and walking with a confident strut (for someone who's still underage). If not, don't worry: Those are the Competitive Gamers who may be taking it too far, as the entire Electronic Sports scene is hardly so presumptuous and much more down-to-earth once you get past the rock-star-wannabe veneer. Electronic Sports, abbreviated e-sports or eSports, is used as a general term to describe the playing of videogames as a professional sport. Competitive Gaming, CyberSports, Cyber Athletics and V-Sports all mean the same thing.

Usually first-person shooters, real-time strategy or sports games are considered for e-Sports and then played competitively at both amateur and professional levels.

**Playing Electronic Sports:** The easiest way to play an e-Sports match is via the Internet. General online play does come with several drawbacks: it's harder to spot

cheaters and unpredictable lag may hamper both enjoyment and your score. LAN parties are often used for practice when it comes to e-Sports, due to convenience.

Teams, or as they are often called, "clans" or "guilds", contact each other prior to matches. Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is very popular for this since a clan, league or gaming-related organisation can set up its own IRC channel, making them easy to find. Popular online leagues include Cyberathlete Amateur League ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyberathlete\\_Amateur\\_League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyberathlete_Amateur_League)), CyberEvolution (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CyberEvolution>), Major League Gaming ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major\\_League\\_Gaming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_League_Gaming)), and the Electronic Sports League ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic\\_Sports\\_League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_Sports_League)).

These days, most games that emphasise online or competitive play come with their own integrated ladders and advanced anti-cheating.

**Electronic Sports History:** Since inception, games have been played competitively. The "Arcade Era" could be considered the start of e-Sports. The US National Video Game Team was created in 1983 and ran competitions and kept track of high scores. The 1987 Video Game Masters Tournament was organised by them for Guinness World Records. Nintendo even held their own World Championships in 1990, touring across the US. The finals were held in Oakland, California with 90 finalists. Thor Aackerlund was named champion. In the early 1990s Blockbuster Video also ran their own World Game Championships, co-hosted by *GamePro magazine*. People from the US,



Canada, UK, Australia and Chile competed in games such as *NBA Jam* and *Virtua Racing*.

With the advent of the Internet, the "Internet era" of e-Sports got its major kick from *Quake* co-creator John Carmack offering up his own red Ferrari 328 GTS convertible to the winner of the "Red Annihilation" tournament in 1997. Dennis Fong, a.k.a. "Thresh" took the prize and the car at the *Quake* competitive e-Sport event. Later that year, Angel Munoz launched his league for gamers, the Cyberathlete Professional League or CPL. The CPL was majorly responsible for the successive growth of e-Sports since. In 2005 the CPL moved to a World Tour format, with the 2005 CPL World Tour focused on the one-on-one deathmatch game *Painkiller* (which had a total prize purse of \$1,000,000). e-Sports is serious business.

Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel is the current truly visible e-Sports professional and in addition to receiving numerous product endorsements, has featured in mainstream newsprint publications including *Time*, *The New York Times*, *Forbes* and the BBC World Service. He says he practises at least two to six hours a day, sometimes more. He debuted in 1999 by finishing third in the *Quake III Arena* tournament at the CPL's FRAG 3 event.

In 2003, the first Electronic Sports World Cup was held with a total of 358 participants from 37 countries and a prize purse of 150,000 euros. By 2006, the event had grown to 547 qualified participants from 53 countries and a prize purse of \$400,000. The same year also saw the launch of Major League Gaming, a console gaming competition. In 2006, Major League Gaming was the first televised console gaming league in the US.

These days, players can be bound into contracts with their sponsored clans as the stakes in e-Sports rise. In 2003, SK Gaming became one of the first clubs in FPS gaming to legally bind players to their clan and while the specifics of the contracts remain undisclosed, it is known that the contracts include a salary and shares in the prize money.

Professional Electronic Sports Titles: A few games have very developed e-Sports scenes, where top players can make a living playing the games on the marketing value they gain as a result. The most

popular tournaments are those run by the Cyberathlete Professional League, the World Cyber Games, the World e-Sports Games, the Electronic Sports World Cup and the Major League Gaming. The prize money for these events are generally sponsored by large technology corporations, who also tend to sponsor teams. A team sponsorship usually includes travel expenses and sometimes free hardware specific to that company.

The predominant international scenes lay with *Counter-Strike* (tactical team FPS, PC), *FIFA Football* (sports, PC), *Halo 2* (tactical team FPS, Xbox), *Quake 4* (deathmatch FPS, PC), *Super Smash Bros. Melee* (versus fighting, GameCube), *StarCraft* (real-time strategy, PC), *Street Fighter* series (versus fighting, PS2), *WarCraft III* (real-time strategy, PC), *World of Warcraft* (MMORPG, PC) and *Guild Wars* (MMORPG, PC).

In South Africa, the predominant competitive games include *Command and Conquer 3*, *PGR*, *Battlefield*, *Call of Duty* as well as *Gears of War*. As the South African e-Sports scene is still in development phase, it may or may not follow the international leagues depending on how interested local sponsors are.

#### Professional Leagues:

- **AGASA Gamers League**  
(Local) - [www.agasa.co.za](http://www.agasa.co.za)
- **ClanBase EuroCup**  
(International) - [clanbase.ggl.com](http://clanbase.ggl.com)
- **World Cyber Games**  
(International) - [www.worldcybergames.com](http://www.worldcybergames.com)
- **Electronic Sports World Cup**  
(International) - [www.eswc.com](http://www.eswc.com)
- **Cyberathlete Professional League**  
(International) - [www.thecpl.com](http://www.thecpl.com)
- **Championship Gaming Series**  
(International) - [www.thecgs.com](http://www.thecgs.com)
- **World e-Sports Games**  
(International) - [www.weglive.com](http://www.weglive.com)
- **Major League Gaming**  
(North America) - [www.mlgpro.com](http://www.mlgpro.com)
- **TeamWarfare League**  
(North America and Europe) - [www.teamwarfare.com](http://www.teamwarfare.com)
- **NGL One**  
(Europe) - [www.ngl-one.com](http://www.ngl-one.com)
- **ESL Extreme Masters**  
(Europe) - [www.esl-world.net/masters](http://www.esl-world.net/masters)

- **ESL Pro Series** (Germany) - [www.esl.eu](http://www.esl.eu)

#### THIS IS YOUR RIFLE, THIS

**IS YOUR GUN!**

**Ordinance: Purchasing Games**

There is a cabal of gaming retailers that seem to have it together, which is always a Good Thing(tm). Here is a quick reference guide for buying games online, based on our own personal experience as well as positive feedback from readers and NAG Online forum members. When it comes to purchasing games online from the local retailers, most of them do proper and affordable shipping to anywhere in the country. Online retail, especially in games, has grown from strength to strength in South Africa over the last few years and some banks (like Standard Bank) are already integrating their own secure online transaction software into the online retailers.

Don't simply use one Website, try to compare pricing between several to see where you can get a good deal. The benefit to shopping online is, you can quickly and easily see where the best price is at without having to drive to several stores.

#### GAME RETAILERS:

**www.take2.co.za:** Professional and long-running online retailer that deals in movies, music, hardware and most importantly, videogames. Large variety in stock, based in Cape Town for collections but ships country-wide at reasonable pricing. Their Website is very functional.

**www.amx.co.za:** AnimeWorx has a firm standing in the gaming community due to their diligent service, professional stock and cocky attitude. They also stock in Manga and Anime and unlike most game retailers, usually know their stuff. The staff may be prone to fanboy bias, but that's forgivable. It is highly recommended that every local gamer make at least one pilgrimage to the AnimeWorx store in Brightwater Commons, Johannesburg. Be sure to tell them NAG sent you!

**www.btgames.co.za:** Through some very smart choices, BT Games has managed to become a firm favourite with the locals when it comes to pre-ordering games for various benefits. BT Games deals in a lively trade and their Website does the job.

**www.lookandlisten.co.za:** Dealing primarily in music but having expanded into gaming with a vengeance, Look & Listen is another quality service that actually makes a decent enough effort at understanding all this gaming business.

**www.kalahari.net:** Everyone knows kalahari.net by now, but their gaming stock is often overlooked. Books and music aside, kalahari stocks a wide selection of games for all systems and is a good place to browse.

#### GOOD LUCK, SOLDIER!

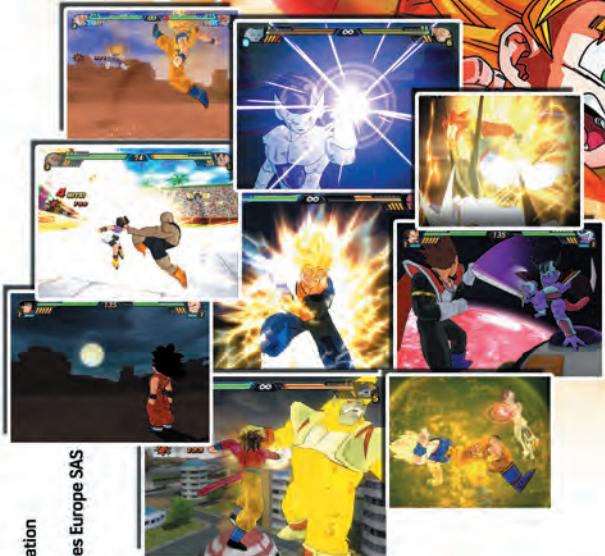
**Next month: supplements!**

Next month we'll be running a supplemental Field Guide that covers a few more basic issues that deserve extra attention, as well as anything else we forgot. If you enjoyed this feature and would like to see more guides of this kind, be sure to drop us a comment on the NAG Online forums (forums.tidemedia.co.za) or email us! **NAG**

THE ULTIMATE DBZ BUDOKAI TENKAICHI GAME!



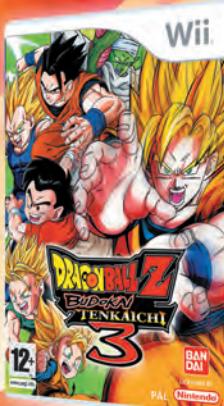
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Out Feb '08

## E-SPORTS TODAY WHO MAKES THE RULES?

**I**T'S ALWAYS INTERESTING TO discuss art with the artist who created it. Sometimes they're so in tune with their audience it's inspiring, but other times their views on their own work seem so far from the mark that one cannot help but wonder whether the entire artistic process was just an accident. These were the thoughts going through my mind as I waited in the interview room to speak with the man behind the Unreal Tournament series. Which kind of artist would Mark Rein be?

I must confess; I already had a pretty good idea. The people at Epic Games have a particularly poor reputation amongst the competitive gaming community. And sure enough, the impression I got was of a man completely disconnected from the hardcore player base. To be fair, there's nothing really wrong with that. The majority of people who buy the game don't ever play online. But it does beg the question: Does he have any business deciding how the game should be played in tournaments? More generally, should developers be allowed to prescribe tournament rules for their games?

Frankly, they all gave up that right a long time ago. Even though it had already been established that certain features were essential for competitive play, very few of them have been included in any games since. Things as elementary as warm-up mode, player voting and spectator overlay are routinely left out by developers and have to be added by mod teams after the fact. Then there's the all-important issue of randomness. Developers make decisions based on what they personally believe is 'fun' rather than what has been determined by rigorous play testing. For example, bright skins and hit sounds are used for a reason: bright skins remove randomness caused by variations in textures and lighting (ever more important with recent advances in graphics technology); and hit sounds offset the effect of projectile-model collision bugs. Not to mention that they add a whole new skill element, in that one must keep a mental record of how much health one's opponent has left and plan one's strategy accordingly.

While developers (and/or publishers) own the intellectual rights to the games and can legally do anything they please, it simply makes no sense for them to go against the collective wishes of the community. Firstly, it costs them nothing to acquiesce: nobody is trying to change the out-of-the-box version of the game and, self-admittedly, very few of them care anything for the e-sports scene. Secondly, insisting on problematic rules or modes will only result in fewer people attending tournaments. Competitive gamers may not be the largest demographic, but it still makes no sense to throw us away on what amounts to nothing more than a whim.

Anton Lines

# MARK REIN ON UTIII: SIMPLER. BETTER. FASTER.

**A WAY FROM THE COMMOTION** of the gaming floor at the international *Unreal Tournament III* launch, NAG's Anton "bsk" Lines sat down with the vice president and co-founder of Epic Games, the incorrigible Mark Rein, to get to the bottom of his company's latest and greatest offering.

**First of all, congratulations on the successful launch of *Unreal Tournament III*.**

Thank you very much.

**Was there any one aspect that you considered above all else when developing the game?**

I don't think you can point to this or that, but we definitely wanted to bring back some of the feel of the original *Unreal Tournament* - for example, by bringing gravity a bit more down to earth and having the stinger return. We were also trying to simplify things a little by not having as many game modes, but rather concentrating on a few good ones that people like to play.

**Are you aiming more at the competitive or the casual players?**

I've always said, "We make the game that we love to play." I'm a pretty mainstream gamer, but we have many guys on the team who are hardcore gamers. I think we're trying to make a game for everyone. One thing we did was simplifying the menus. In the past, we had way too many options, way too many things that you could tweak and change. Now, we're kind of squeezing it down into something everybody can enjoy and that's easy to get into. However, you can still go into the configuration files, if you're "That guy," and make those changes.

**The community had been expecting a long Beta-testing phase, but the launch of the final game has sprung up on us rather quickly. Was there enough time for testing and revising?**

We had thousands of people playing within minutes of the release of the demo. What are we going to learn in a few weeks that we cannot learn in the first two hours? When you have so many people downloading the demo and playing it with the specific idea that it's a Beta, and going to our forums and giving us feedback, I mean, taking another week - or two weeks or five weeks or eight weeks - just results in the same feedback over and over again. We got many good comments and we've built them into the game.

**What sorts of things did you change from the demo to the launch version?**

We don't talk about that. It's a Beta for a reason, right? We don't want to detract from how great the game is by talking about all the little changes we made to it.

**How do you feel about the concept of e-sports?**

I don't know if it's something I would watch, but it's something I like to play - that's for sure. I enjoy playing golf, but watching it is also kind of boring.

**You were once quoted as saying "graphics equals gameplay."**



You see, people don't understand what that comment was about. What I was pointing out was that people were saying, "We want to turn off all the graphics and have this really basic level where we can pick out everybody from the crowd." Well, that's not what *UT* is. You're not supposed to see the guy clearly from three miles away. There are supposed to be places to hide and get in the shadows and get away from your opponent. My point was that if you take that graphical element away, you're changing the gameplay.

**Do you think the community has a right to determine what the game is and how it should be played?**

They can do whatever they want! When you make a game that lets people mod it in so many incredible ways, you have to be comfortable with that. To me, though, if you're going to have an *Unreal Tournament* competition, it should be, you know, *Unreal Tournament*. The game should look like *Unreal Tournament* and the contest should be about playing *Unreal Tournament*. Putting super green suits on everybody and turning all the textures off is not *Unreal Tournament*.

**There has been talk about the possibility of the console and PC versions being cross-compatible in multiplayer. Will we be seeing anything like this?**

The problem was that it just introduced too many complications with keeping the PC version updated and improved. On the console side, you have this big certification process and we didn't want to be delaying releases of - or not doing - PC patches because of this complicated process. Therefore, we've kept the two sides separate. However, the beautiful thing is that we do have the best parts of cross-platform compatibility, in that we have the ability to run PC servers that serve PlayStation 3, and the ability to create PC mods and bring them over to the console. So, we feel we've got the best of both worlds. **NAG**

# EPIC LAUNCHES 'NEXT-GEN' OF E-SPORTS

WHILE SINGLE-PLAYER GAMERS FEAST on the 'next-generation' releases of *Crysis* and *Call of Duty 4*, competitive gamers have at last been treated to a next-gen title of their own. *Unreal Tournament III* by Epic Games, the highly anticipated first-person shooter that is expected to replace *Quake 4* on the professional duelling circuit, has gone Gold (and will probably be available by the time this article goes to print). To celebrate the launch of the game, members of the press were invited to a red-carpet reception at the Omega Sektor gaming centre in Birmingham, UK. NAG was on site to bring you the South African exclusive.

The Omega Sektor is a rare but promising sight for a Western country. Resembling the 'PC Bangs' of South Korea that underlay that country's rapid e-sports growth in the early 2000s, it is a huge, dedicated LAN centre where gamers can play and socialise without the hassle of having to transport their own PCs. Founded by a group of veteran e-sports executives, including the Championship Gaming Series general manager for London, Sujoy Roy, it epitomises the spirit of competitive gaming and was, we felt, an ideal venue for the event.

After checking in at the front desk, we were ushered to the main gaming floor, which had been appropriately kitted out in *UTIII* posters, banners and cardboard cut-outs. The release version of the game had been installed on about a hundred PCs, and we were invited to try it out – or to indulge in snacks and drinks in the VIP room. Naturally, we chose to forego mere bodily sustenance and get in as much play time as possible.

Saving the practical details for the full review, our first impressions were generally favourable. The biggest changes from the demo were a number of important bug fixes and some tweaking in the weapon balance. *UTIII*'s combat movement is extremely quick and the weapons significantly more powerful than in *UT2004*, resulting in shorter and more spectacular battles. This pace is offset somewhat by the removal of dodge-jumping

– making it more time-consuming to move around the maps – and the armour/shield system, a throwback to the original *Unreal Tournament*, which allows for easy defensive control of certain 'power areas'. The maps do a reasonably good job of balancing aggressive and defensive play styles, although it will take several months to properly judge their suitability for use in tournaments.

A pre-release PlayStation 3 version of the game was also on display. From the limited time we were able to play it, we found the most striking feature to be the natural feel of the controls. The option to use a mouse and keyboard is present, but the casual community will probably feel no need to make use of this feature. The newer game types, such as Warfare (similar to *UT2004*'s Onslaught), with vehicles, hover boards and so on, are extremely well suited to the console. Graphically, however, we were somewhat disappointed. The framerate appeared a bit jerky and the colours rather washed-out, compared to the smooth, lush effects of the PC version. Of course, we expect further improvements to be made before the final release.

We were then treated to a presentation by Mark Rein (vice president of Epic Games) and Tanya Jessen (associate producer for *Unreal Tournament III* and *Gears of War*). Mr Rein spoke briefly about Epic's satisfaction with the development process, denying rumours that the team had been pressured into an early release. The day's proceedings were then announced. The main attraction would be a free-for-all tournament, and, alongside it, a Guinness World Record attempt for the most frags in thirty minutes. Everyone in attendance was invited to play in the tournament, but the record attempt was to be made by a select group of professional gamers from Team Dignitas and Four Kings.

As there had been no previous attempts, the winner of the thirty-minute mini-marathon would become the inaugural record holder. It was initially intended to be an hour-long ordeal, but due to technical

difficulties with the game server, the attempt could not get underway until fairly late in the day. Nonetheless, one hundred and thirty-one frags later, Frederick "Frantic" van Gammeren from the Netherlands claimed the title, ahead of his Dignitas teammates, David "Zaccubus" Treacy and Paul "Astz" McGarrity. The award was presented by an official Guinness representative.

As for the open tournament, participants were competing for three specially produced Epic trophies, a number of hardware prizes, and a chance to play a stage match against former *UT2004* world champion, Laurens "Lauke" Plaumakers. Once the usual administrative hiccups had been sorted out, the competitors were divided into groups of ten and everyone was given five rounds to score as many frags as possible. The top two from each group progressed to the next round, and so on. The eventual winner was an up-and-coming UK competitor named Recoil, followed by the lesser-known likes of Spike and Vyd. Recoil was presented with a high-spec gaming PC, while Spike and Vyd each received gaming laptops. The whole experience made it clear that Epic had put significant emphasis on free-for-all gameplay, especially in the design of the maps. With luck, we will see this translating into a bigger 'newbie' community, upon which the health of any e-sports title depends.

After the prize giving, Mark Rein stayed behind to play a few deathmatches with the professional competitors, and kindly answered a few of our questions. The verdict: there is still much community work needed to secure *Unreal Tournament III*'s future as a premier e-sports title. The lack of bright skins, hit sounds, a warm-up mode, weapon accuracy statistics, and a proper duel game type are glaring omissions. Nevertheless, these problems have also been faced by every other successful e-sports game in the past, and were usually solved quickly by mod teams. As a base, due to its adrenaline-fuelled fights and balanced weapons, *UTIII* certainly has immense potential. **NAG**

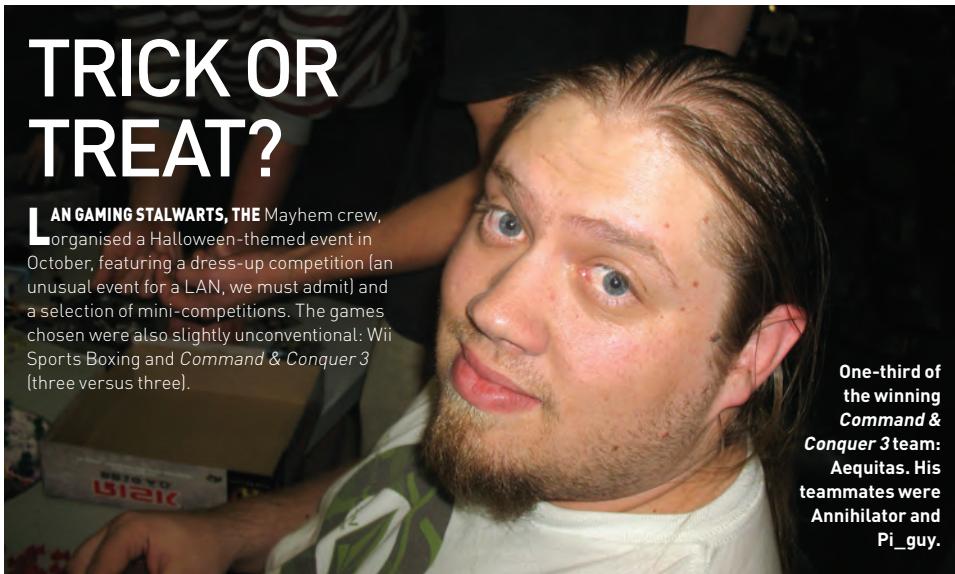
## TRICK OR TREAT?

AN GAMING STALWARTS, THE Mayhem crew, organised a Halloween-themed event in October, featuring a dress-up competition (an unusual event for a LAN, we must admit) and a selection of mini-competitions. The games chosen were also slightly unconventional: Wii Sports Boxing and *Command & Conquer 3* (three versus three).

One-third of the winning *Command & Conquer 3* team: **Aequitas**. His teammates were **Annihilator** and **Pi\_guy**.



The Halloween costume winner, Grimm. A fitting nickname indeed.



# COMPETITION RECAP

GAME.DEV HAS A GAME DEVELOPMENT COMPETITION EVERY TWO MONTHS (OR THEREABOUTS). WE INTERRUPT OUR IN-PICTURES SERIES TO BRING YOU LAST YEAR'S SUCCESSFUL GAMES.

## COMPETITION 11

THE LAST COMPETITION WE covered in the magazine was Competition 10. We gave away R10,000 in prize money (sponsored by NAG) during rAge 2006. The sheer scale of Competition 10 meant that many people needed a bit of a break from development after losing sleep trying to get their entries finished on time. To accommodate this and give everyone some downtime, Competition 11 asked of people to write a brief tutorial on any aspect of game development. The honours were taken by newcomer Cathy "Kensai" Knights, and veteran Simon "Tr00jg" de la Rouviere. Kensai's article about *AI Conversation Handling* took first place, while Tr00jg's tutorial on *How to build a Quiz game in Game Maker* secured second place. Unfortunately, tutorials don't make for exciting screenshots, but we suggest you give them a read over at the Game.Dev Website (<http://www.GameDotDev.co.za>).

## COMPETITION 12

The challenge in Competition 12 was to build a single-PC, multiplayer game. Give people a reason to sit down with each other and play things. Bring back the triumphant party games of yesteryear. *Ironman Offroad Racing*. *Star Control*. *Bubble Bobble*. That sort of thing... It turned out that the community was well rested and chomping at the bit to get working on something, because they all took to the competition with a vengeance! This made it a very hard competition to judge, especially given that each game required two people to properly test it. In the end, things looked like this:

First place went to a frantic scream-fest of a game called *Bug Basher*, by Justin "Agrajag" Wernick. Besides impassioned screaming, gameplay revolves around a pair of players defending a central point from spam, hackers, Trojan viruses and other Internet nasties, with one of you piloting the mouse while the other drives the keyboard. As the game progresses you earn money with which you can buy player-specific upgrades and special abilities to help you and (temporarily) alleviate the pressing need to scream your coordination attempts.

Second place was taken by the incredibly ambitious *Overseer Assault*, by Gareth "Gazza\_N" Wilcock. It pits two to four players against each other in a turn-based battle of wits and skill between menacing robotic Overseers and fragile human Attackers, with each side playing very differently: Overseers place and control various types of turrets; and Attackers top-down, weapon-toting commando types. *Overseer Assault*'s scale makes the game great fun and a very novel experience, but it means that quite a few bugs haunt the game.

Third place position on the podium went to *Wizards*, a fast-paced combat game by Stefan Nel. In it, two players take control

of rival wizards, flinging spells at each other as quickly as possible and as often as mana reserves allow. There is an aspect of economic management (mana can be generated by certain spells), but in general, the game is simply a blast-out influenced by the initial elemental affinity choices made by the players.

## COMPETITION 13

In any given year, we'll typically have at least one "polish" competition. No, we're not talking about invading anywhere, but rather a competition focused around making an existing game you've worked on even better. Competition 13 mixed up the standard "Improve on your game" format by adding in "List your games and community members will vote which one they want you to improve".

First: *Overseer Assault*. Everyone voted that Gazza\_N spit-shine his game after its success in Competition 12 and boy did he deliver. Without the bugs that plagued it a few months before, it was a huge amount of fun to play and a shoe-in for the top spot.

Second: *Roach Toaster 2*. Tr00jg's perennial *Roach Toaster* keeps popping up in these polish competitions, because they're exactly what he needs, seeing as he's working hard to complete *RT2* so that he can take it online to be sold. But the level of improvement in just under a month of development time was astounding, even for him. When it's finally released, *RT2* is going to be a great turn-based, insect-busting strategy romp.

Third: *Killer Worm 2*. UncleSam doesn't frequent the forums as often as he used to, but he's still keen to develop games. You can see that in his extension of an idea that won him Competition 8. *Killer Worm* is now even bigger and more detailed, complete with changing seasons and more intricate terrain on which to devour semi-helpless pixel people.

## COMPETITION 14

Few of the new generation of game developers coming up through the community knew much about the Demo Scene; that arcane world of pushing computer hardware and clever techniques to generate wonderful eye candy. That's a shame that needed rectifying, seeing as many scene effects and algorithms directly fed back into game development tips and tricks (and indeed, vice versa). So, Competition 14 challenged people to create a small, good looking demo effect that featured the Game.Dev brand in some way... It had very little to do with a large sponsorship deal possibly requiring TV ad material. Nope, none at all.

In the end, the two entries that ended up forming the gist of the raw Game.Dev Competition 15 ad (which you can see on the DVD) were Gazza\_N's extremely nifty 'Resonance Phase' effect and UncleSam's





incredibly trippy platformer 'Demo1'. Honourable mention also needs to go Squid's 'Inquiring Mind', without which we would never have had the interesting forum debate that turned into bloom effects in Game Maker.

Unfortunately the advert itself never made it onto TV, but it would have been an amazing prize if it had. Competition 15 was advertised on the airwaves though, so perhaps it's time to tell you why...

### COMPETITION 15

In 2006, the competition that preceded rAge was huge. Competition 10 generated a lot of interest and participation, mainly because we had tons of prize money to hand out to the winners. Somehow that's always a motivating force... This year, Competition 15 would end just before rAge and by an interesting series of coincidences, Mindset Learn were keen on getting involved with Game.Dev in the interests of finding out how well games could become a medium for education. Mindset agreed to sponsor another R10,000, provided that we challenged developers to produce games with some form of learning slant. Thus, the concept of Guerrilla Learning was born and some truly amazing things happened...

In a repeat of his Competition 10 placing, Cadyn "Evil\_Toaster" Bridgman secured himself (and his rapidly growing team) first place and R5,000 yet again with his entry, *Cartesian Chaos*. CC (as he likes to call it) is a casual action game where you have to defend the Origin (the centre of all maths) from unhappy rectangular expressions by clicking the quadrant, point or line they define on the Cartesian plane around the Origin.

Evil\_Toaster has since started his own game development company, RetroToast (<http://www.retrotoast.com>), and *Cartesian Chaos* is actually available for purchase online right now, having impressed the publisher who enjoyed the Competition 10 winning game, *Fast Food in Space*. That's right, enter Game.Dev competitions, develop games, win money, create your dream job! *Cartesian Chaos* really is that good, especially if you're looking for a casual game with some lasting benefit instead of being really good at matching three blocks of the same colour.

Second position and a hefty R2,500 went to Gareth "Gazza\_N" Wilcock, who popped onto the community after waxing lyrical about game designs during rAge 2006, and has since become a regular fixture on the podium, not to mention providing invaluable help during rAge 2007. His entry, *Rockets!*, allows players to experiment with and build their own rockets, thus playing with things like vectors, gravity, aerodynamics and thrust to weight ratios without a single boring concept in sight. The introductory tutorial is on its own an amazing piece of design and pacing, making you itch to try and hit that target the next time! There's talk of Mindset and Gazza

working together in the future to create a more polished version of *Rockets!*, similar to how *Cartesian Chaos* (whose name Gazza is directly responsible for) is now a commercial product, but we'll have to see how that goes.

One thing that is more concrete is what's currently happening to the third-place game, *Math Attack* by Robbie "Squid" Fraser. Mindset found the mathematically-orientated puzzle mechanic perfectly suited for a project that they're working on that just happened to have a cellphone game shaped hole. Squid not only won himself R1,500, but spent some time during his recent exams working on a paid prototype to test some new gameplay ideas for Mindset.

### COMPETITION 16

Attempting to follow up as huge a success as Competition 15 would have been tricky had the perfect inspiration not cropped up. Challenge people to build games using only text, no advanced graphics. That simple limitation seemed to unlock a flood of creativity in the community, as evidenced by the winners:

First: *Ultimate Quest* by Claudio "Chippit" de Sa and Tarryn "Azimuth" van der Byl (yes, she whose ascerbic wit is usually reserved for game reviews). *Ultimate Quest* is an old-school text adventure filled with ASCII art and biting humour. Seriously, it has a "Lick" command and sports a pixel shader 2.0 bloom filter for text. How can you not respect that? Plans for *UQ2* are already being worked on.

Second: *Retro Tank* by Cadyn "Evil\_Toaster" Bridgman. RetroToast strikes again, this time with a fun little action shooter. Take out the Letter's capital ships (pun gleefully intended) and collect power-ups in search of a score high enough to stop the game insulting you when you die.

Third: Tie between *Alpha Snake* by Rishal "TheUntouchableOne" Hurbans and *RUBIX* by Chris "BlackHawk" Buys. *Alpha Snake* takes that old classic *Snake* (or *Nibbles*, if you're old enough), adds new gameplay modes, converts everything to text and asks you to spell words to get longer. Play it for the *Quake III* style announcer voice... *RUBIX* is a slightly difficult game to get into, mainly because there's so much text there. That text, once you get into it, provides an awesome story, which makes you want to complete the interesting puzzles just to find out what happens to Julia next.

### IN CLOSING

The growth that we've seen this year, not only in number of developers, but skill and game polish too, has been way beyond expectations. We thought 2006 was good, but in 2007 we helped launch game development careers! There's really nothing more you can ask for in terms of community success. We're another step closer to that goal of a vibrant local game development industry. Congratulations to the winners. Play their games on the DVD! **NAG**



# MOVIE NEWS

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## I Am Legend

**Director:** Francis Lawrence  
**Cast:** Will Smith, Alice Braga, Salli Richardson-Whitfield  
**Genre:** Sci-fi Horror  
**Release:** Dec 2008

**R**OBERT NEVILLE IS THE last man still alive in New York City; possibly the world. He is the last person not infected by a manmade virus that has turned everyone else into what can be considered as vampires. Even though these people technically aren't dead, they crave blood and hunt Neville when they can. He, in turn, kills them when he can. Meanwhile, he is trying hard to find a cure for the disease and believes that around two percent of the population is immune to it. He also has a personal stake in this: he was part of the lab that accidentally unleashed the virus. His blood is immune to the virus, but he's running out of time as the infected keep hunting him.

Thus starts *I Am Legend*, a new sci-fi horror starring Will Smith. It is based on a 1954 novel of the same name, though it remains to be seen if it follows the same moribund plot. In the book, the story is not about the lead character saving the world, but discovering his place in it. With the amount of time and money that went into this latest project, it's unlikely that the producers will allow anything other than a feel-good ending. We might be wrong (which would be great since it's an excellent story), but no, one at the NAG towers are holding their breath.

This isn't the first time the book has been adapted. *The Last Man on Earth*, *I am Omega* and *Omega Man* are all based on the novel. *I am Legend*'s production started in the Nineties, where it was originally going to be a Ridley Scott movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. But the bloated budget scared off the studio and the project was shelved for a while. It now returns with Smith in the leading role and Francis Lawrence (*Constantine*) takes the director's chair. The movie is still not cheap. One scene involving the Brooklyn Bridge cost \$5 million to film - the most expensive scene shot in New York City.

With the release happening around the end of December, we'll all know soon enough how far the script stuck to the original story. But *I Am Legend* should be a tense psychological ride and Will Smith's fans will be happy to see him in another big role. Does he even do small ones anymore?





## The Mist

**Director:** Frank Darabont

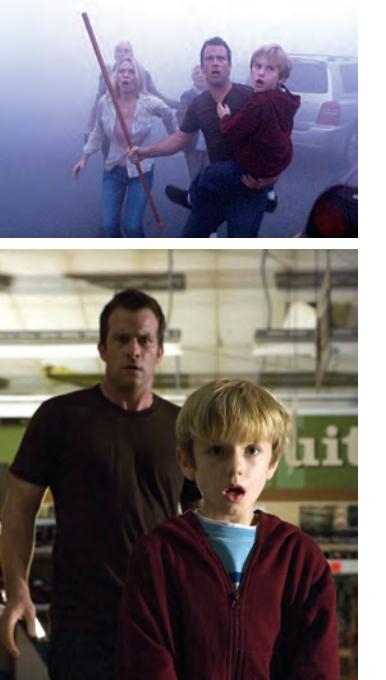
**Cast:** Thomas Jane, Andre Braugher, Laurie Holden

**Genre:** Horror, thriller

**Release:** Dec 2008

ONE OF FRANK DARABONT'S goals in life was to adapt *The Mist* into a movie. The story first appeared in *Dark Forces*, a Stephen King story collection, and later in his famed *Skeleton Crew* short story book. Darabont is no stranger to King's work: he was involved, amongst other projects, with the production of *The Green Mile* and *The Shawshank Redemption*. Basically, he's the right man for the job, especially when judging fan reactions to *The Mist* in the US.

In the small town of Bridgton, a strange fog arrives after a particularly intense thunder storm. The fog isn't benign - there appears to be strange creatures lurking in it, eager to grab and kill whoever they come across. Several of the town's people and other characters take shelter in a large grocery store, where they try to survive and figure out where the fog came from. Some blame a local army base and experiments they are rumoured to be working on. Others prefer to think of it all as Armageddon and start acting like it. Soon the fog might not be the biggest problem, at least not as big as some of the survivors going mad because of visions of the end of the world. Movie versions of King's films



have been hit-and-miss affairs, but this one seems to be one of the better ones. Certainly a must-see for his fans.

## Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

**Director:** Tim Burton

**Cast:** Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter,

Alan Rickman

**Genre:** Horror Musical

**Release:** TBA

SWEENEY TODD IS A popular English literature character - a serial killer barber who would cut his victims' throats with a shaving blade and drink their blood. In some stories he even had accomplices who, amongst other things, would bake pies made from the victims. Grim stuff, but apparently all very tongue-in-cheek. So, somehow it seems really natural that Tim Burton would be attracted to such a character. In his latest film, Burton adapts the musical (written in the Seventies) to film. That means Johnny Depp will sing. Yes, Depp returns to work with Burton for a sixth time, but he has called the director his favourite on several occasions. The tabloids report that he even practiced the songs while filming the third *Pirates of the*

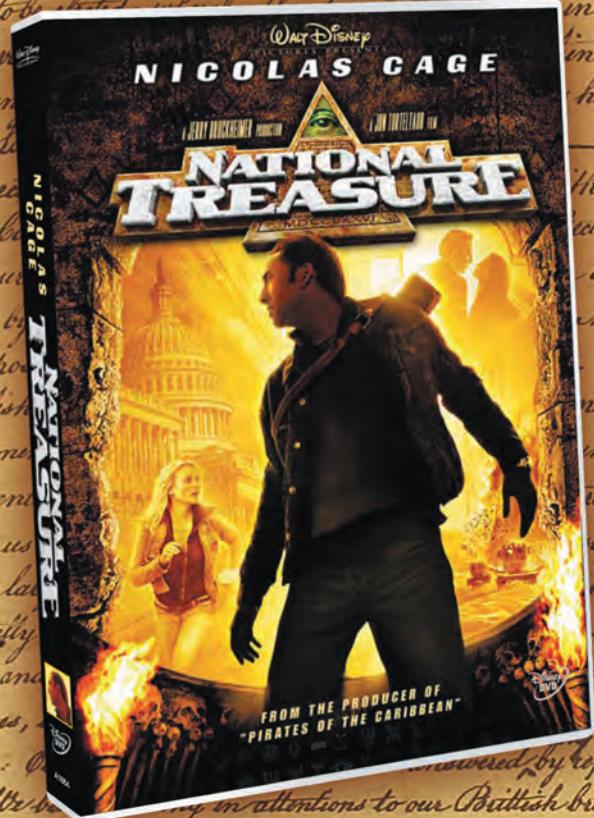


*Caribbean* movie. Another Burton and Depp stalwart, Helena Bonham Carter, also stars as well as the delightfully evil Alan Rickman as the villain, Judge Turpin. Depp isn't a fan of musicals, but said he couldn't pass up on a musical about a serial killer. If it isn't obvious yet, fans of Burton can expect him back at his Gothic best - *Sweeney Todd* already looks like a mix between *Sleepy Hollow* and *Edward Scissorhands*.

in the course of human events, it becomes necessary and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. For this end, we are associated together, and constitute a new State.

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BUY IT NOW ON

# Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End

**Director:** Gore Verbinski

**Cast:** Johnny Depp, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley

**Genre:** Adventure

**Rating:** PG13

**Score:** **★★★**

**A**LRIGHT, HERE WE GO. For a third and final (well it was, until talks of a fourth started) movie in this series, Jack Sparrow returns and is being chased around by all kinds of bad history he started. Actually, he is yet to return. At first, it's up to Will, Elizabeth, Barbarossa and a pirate crew to sail over the edge of the world and rescue Sparrow from the underworld. This won't make Davie Jones very happy, but he's currently enslaved by the British Navy, which plans to destroy all the pirates once and for all. Can Sparrow get the pirate lords together, stop the British and get Jones off his case? Actually, can the rest of the cast do that while Jack tries to cover his own ass? Yes, the second movie wasn't that good, thanks to loads of plot being shoveled in. Strangely enough, that didn't appear to be necessary. *At World's End* carries on, happily ignoring any plot holes or meaningful explanations. Even after finishing the trilogy, *Dead Man's Chest* makes little sense, really. But the good news is that the third movie ignores all



the plot because it's too busy setting up action and comedy scenes. It's as carefree as the first movie, but not quite as good because it comes with a lot of baggage. It tries hard to ignore its recent past in an intoxicated stupor, so *At World's End* is not quite damaged goods. Just a bit too wreckless for its own good. But you'll forget it for all the times it

gets really drunk and starts throwing out stuff like a massive maelstrom, thousands of ship-carrying crabs or the most ridiculous pirate meeting ever (including a Keith Richards cameo). The two-disc edition comes with a lot of nice extras: most of the stuff used to promote the movie, as well as deleted scenes and a blooper reel. **JF**

## Paprika

**Director:** Satoshi Kon

**Cast:** n/a

**Genre:** Fantasy anime

**Rating:** PG (V)

**Score:** **★★★★**

**W**OAH, WHERE TO BEGIN? Those of us who are well familiar with anime (good anime, at least), know to expect the unconventional. In *Paprika*, this is taken to new heights. The screenplay is based on an avant-garde novel by Yasutaka Tsutsui; one that was intended for a screen adaptation, but never became a live action film due to the cost that would be involved. Ironically, an anime interpretation is arguably better suited to the subject matter: dreams. The story starts off by introducing the audience to a 'dream machine', which can be used to record dreams, and to allow people to share their dreams, mainly for therapeutic purposes.

However, this device is stolen, and is applied to a nefarious end. The result is a rollercoaster ride that takes us back and forth between reality and the dream world, and it is at times difficult to tell the difference right away. The movie is flooded with surreal imagery, imaginative use of colours, and characters often demonstrate duality, as reflections of their real life and dream selves. The story is actually fairly straightforward, even though at times it appears quite complicated. The title ships with two DVDs: the first contains the film itself, while the second is filled with very comprehensive documentary material about the conceptualisation and realisation of the movie. This movie is not specifically for fans of anime: it is, rather, highly recommended for all lovers of quality abstract cinema. This title is unique, and truly unforgettable. **AJ**



## Hairspray

**Director:** Adam Shankman

**Cast:** John Travolta, Michelle Pfeiffer, Christopher Walken, Amanda Bynes, James Marsden, Queen Latifa

**Genre:** Musical/Comedy

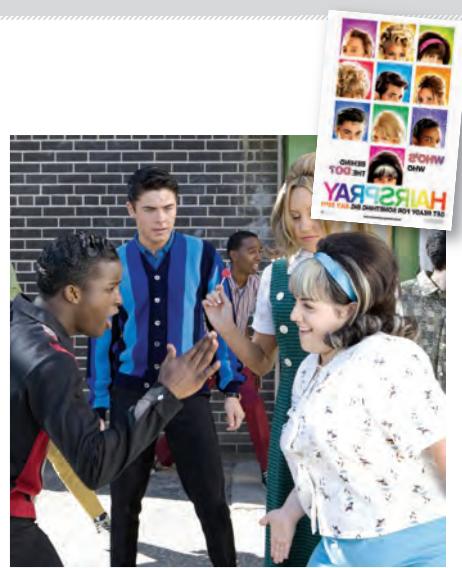
**Rating:** PG

**Score:** **★★★★**

**A**NDADAPTATION OF THE Tony Award-winning 2002 Broadway musical of the same name (adapted from John Waters' 1988 comedy film), *Hairspray* is a fun frolicking romp through 1960s Baltimore as Tracy Turnblad rallies against racial segregation while trying to pursue stardom as a dancer on a local TV show.

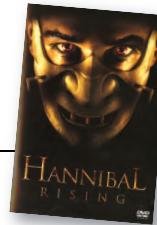
There really is only one thing to say about *Hairspray*: John Travolta as Edna Turnblad, Tracy's mother, is just too adorable. Christopher Walken as Wilbur Turnblad, her father and a gag-store owner, comes in a close second if only for his subtle performance. The movie is

a musical through and through with 18 catchy musical numbers that may, at times, seem to go on forever but retain their sense of fun. Nikki Blonsky plays a convincingly jovial role as the 'pleasantly plump' Tracy, who literally and perhaps unwittingly uses enthusiasm as an effective blunt instrument for changing the world into a better place. The big, bright and camp nature of the film may cause the 'serious people' to turn a blind eye, but that's their problem. Besides, Michelle Pfeiffer is well worth the price of admission alone in her role as a station manager with some serious issues. The DVD is lacking in the features department, with only a 'Singalong' mode that lets you skip straight to a song and switch on karaoke subtitles. A director's commentary would have been nice, but the lack of it doesn't make the DVD explode and kill your loved ones. **MD**



# Hannibal Rising

**Director:** Peter Webber  
**Cast:** Gaspard Ulliel, Gong Li, Rhys Ifans  
**Genre:** Thriller  
**Rating:** 18V  
**Score:** ★★



**B**EFORE SPOOKING JODIE FOSTER, before Ralph Fiennes tattooed his back, before Julianne Moore became Clarice, even before *Manhunter* there was... *Hannibal Rising*. Was that dramatic enough? Because it would take a lot of loud noise to avoid the fact that this latest (and hopefully last) movie from Thomas Harris's Lector books was really just there to milk things a last time. The movie takes us to the beginnings, to find out what made Hannibal the monster he turned into. As with all Hollywood movies, it's all the

Nazis' fault - specifically enlisted locals by the Germans somewhere in Europe, who discover young Hannibal and his younger sister hiding in the woods. They eat his sibling, but Hannibal escapes, survives a society orphanage, gets refined by his Asian aunt and then turns to take revenge on the men. If it all sounds a bit stupid and cliché-ridden, it is. It's not that a movie sympathetic to Lector is a bad thing. The story seems unreal and feels more like a convenient explanation than a real study of Hannibal's dark nature. The acting is also rather bad and *Hannibal Rising* is really not creepy. Not even for a second. **JF**



## Asterix and the Vikings

**Directors:** Stefan Fjeldmark and Jesper Møller  
**Cast (English):** Paul Giamatti, Brad Garret, Sean Astin, John DiMaggio  
**Genre:** Animated  
**Rating:** PG  
**Score:** ★★★★

**T**HE FIRST ANIMATED ASTERIX feature film was *Asterix the Gaul* (1967), followed by six more animated feature films ending with *Asterix Conquers America* (1994). Two live-action feature films followed, with *Asterix and Obelix take on Caesar* (1999) and *Asterix & Obelix: Mission Cleopatra* (2002). As you can see, it's been thirteen years since the last animated Asterix and if you're a fan, it's been too long.

*Asterix and the Vikings*, produced in France and Denmark, was adapted from the original *Asterix and the Normans* graphic novel, but includes interesting new updates, characters and anachronistic references to modern technology. Overall, the movie is a testament to the general appeal of Asterix across cultures and age groups, a wonderful adventure that easily appeals to both young and old.

You can watch *Asterix and the Vikings* in the original French with English subtitles, or in English. Naturally, the English dialogue is slightly altered to appeal to Western-English sensibilities, but it manages to retain the general gist of the humour quite well.



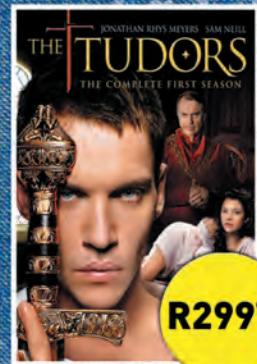
Stalwart Asterix fans may find the pace (and occasional scenes of über-drama/love) a bit much or out of place considering it's Asterix, but the construction of the movie seems aimed at appealing to a wider, more general audience than Asterix ever had before.

The DVD extras include a making-of (in French with English subtitles), a few other featurettes and some trailers. **MD**

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# Norbit

**Director:** Brian Robbins  
**Cast:** Eddie Murphy, Thandie Newton, Eddie Griffin, Terry Crews, Cuba Gooding Jr  
**Genre:** Comedy  
**Rating:** 10 (L)  
**Score:** ★

**REMEMBER WHEN EDDIE MURPHY** used to be funny. Or is it just that I was young and impressionable? I will summarise my impression of this movie, and then you decide whether to continue reading (I will not be offended if you choose not to!). This movie is an hour-and-a-half long display of bad taste. Still here? Alright then; I will expand on the above. This movie starts off with the foundling Norbit, who was dropped off (literally!) at a children's home run by a rather strange Chinese man. Norbit's childhood is briefly shown, and his friendship with Kate, a girl also living at this shelter. The two are separated, eventually, and Norbit goes on to have a 'normal' life, and ends up married to a fat, ugly bitch. Kate then reappears in his life, and much so-called 'hilarity' ensues. The characters in this movie are stereotypical and clichéd, and the acting is the sort of over-the-top acting that is dominated by black men speaking in high-pitched, hysterical tones reminiscent of



Chris Rock's usual vocals. The humour, while it has a few redeeming moments, generally focuses on the grotesque and the repulsive – as mentioned above, bad taste reigns in this flick. The included special features are quite extensive, including, as they do, a "Making of" reel, footage of stunts,

deleted scenes, a photo gallery, and a couple of biographical documentaries. However, given that these additional features merely present more of the same off-putting fare, their presence does nothing to redeem this movie from the ranks of the abysmally appalling. **AJ**

# Howl's Moving Castle

**Directors:** Hayao Miyazaki/Rick Dempsey (co-director English version)  
**Cast:** Jean Simmons, Emily Mortimer, Christian Bale, Lauren Bacall, Billy Crystal  
**Genre:** Fantasy Adventure (Animated)  
**Rating:** PG  
**Score:** ★★★★

**FROM THE CREATOR OF** the Academy Award-winning film, *Spirited Away*, come *Howl's Moving Castle*, an Academy Award-nominated film featuring the voice talents of Hollywood heavyweights, Christian Bale, Lauren Bacall, Emily Mortimer and Billy Crystal.

*Howl's Moving Castle* (known as *Hauru no ugoku shiro* in Japan), based on British writer Diana Wynne Jones's popular fantasy tale, is a lavish, dreamlike animated feature film by Hayao Miyazaki, who also directed such famous and highly regarded films as *Princess Mononoke*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Winds*, *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*.

The film tells the story of Sophie (Mortimer), an eighteen-year-old girl working in a hat shop. One day, in a chance encounter, her life is turned upside down when she is swept of her feet by a mysterious and handsome wizard called Howl (Bale). The dreaded Witch of the Waste (Bacall), who herself desires Howl, turns Sophie into a ninety-year-old woman. Sophie embarks on an incredible adventure to find a cure and finds refuge as a cleaning lady on Howl's magical floating castle (an imposing hotchpotch of anthropomorphic shafts and gears), where she meets, among others, a bad-tempered fire demon named Calcifer (Billy Crystal) and Howl's apprentice, Markl.

As the true power of Howl's wizardry is revealed, and his relationship with his cleaning lady deepens, Sophie finds herself not only looking for a cure to restore herself to the dashing young teenager she



was, but also finds herself fighting to protect herself and the wizard from a dangerous war of sorcery that threatens their world. **ND**

# Blades of Glory

**Directors:** Will Speck and Josh Gordon  
**Cast:** Will Ferrell, Jon Heder, Will Arnett  
**Genre:** Comedy  
**Rating:** 13LV  
**Score:** ★★★

**FIGURE SKATING DOESN'T LOOK** like the hardcore arena of super athletes with wrestler-like appeal fighting for the top spot in a sport that dictates the nation's trends and tastes. But *Blades of Glory* quickly puts that misconception to rest as we get introduced to the furious feud between rock star, Chazz Michael Michael (Ferrell) and skating prodigy, Jimmy MacElroy (Heder); one that gets them both banned from the sport. But a few years later, a trainer convinces

them to enter in a new category: the rules don't say a pairs' team cannot be all male... Thus, we enter another display of the sophisticated slapstick humour Ferrell is known for. Obviously, if you are not a fan of his work, don't watch this. And those enamoured by Jon Heder in *Napoleon Dynamite* shouldn't expect the dry wit of that movie. No, this is more about crotches being grabbed and plenty of other gay innuendo. In the end, though, the only real victim is ice skating, which looks even queerer now. It's more absurd than *Talladega Nights*, maybe too much, but *Blades of Glory* is still funny. The DVD has plenty of extras to keep fans interested. **JF**



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# COMICS

## WATCHMEN

Written by Clive Burmeister

**Format:** Graphic Novel  
**Publisher:** DC Vertigo  
**Writer:** Alan Moore  
**Artist:** Dave Gibbons  
**Price:** R199

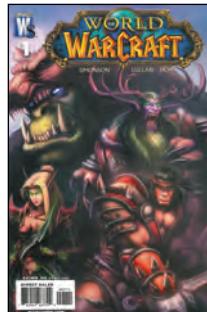
**R**EADING *WATCHMEN* TODAY IS a chance to experience a bit of comic history. Released in the mid-Eighties, *Watchmen* is considered the first comic book aimed at a mature audience. That doesn't mean loads of blood, guts and nudity, but a smart and deep story about a series of strange murders and the looming end of the world. On top of that, it does mature things, so there are violent scenes and crude language to be found. But as with anything over two decades, it's not as harsh as it was back then. Still, *Watchmen* is a great read and it's easy to see why many critics and fans consider it the best graphic novel written. Nowthings have changed, and there are definitely comics today that can stand up to *Watchmen*'s quality. Still, it definitely is a must-read for serious graphic novel fans. The people behind *300* are currently working on a movie adaptation. After reading the novel, it's obvious that they took on a huge task.



## WORLD OF WARCRAFT #1

**Format:** Comic Series  
**Publisher:** Wildstorm  
**Writer:** Walter Simonson  
**Artist:** Ludo Lullabi  
**Price:** R23.50

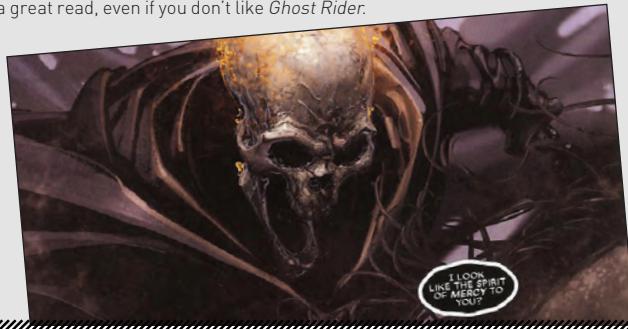
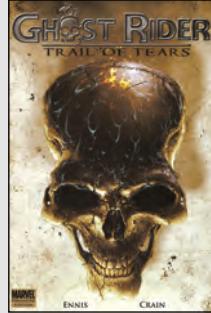
**A**S WITH ITS PREDECESSOR *WarCraft*, *World of WarCraft* has expanded into all spheres of the entertainment industry, and is no longer just a computer game. From card games, to action figures, the *World of WarCraft* universe can be experienced by fans across a huge range of media, and now it has reached comics as well. I was a bit skeptical when I first picked up issue one to look at, thinking it might be like so many other cases where some unknown and untalented people used another's story to 'jump on the band wagon', so to speak. But I was pleasantly surprised with this comic. It might not be the best comic I've ever read, but it is enjoyable and its artwork is young and fresh, keeping in touch with the story. It is also quite informative with the world's background, so even those who aren't too familiar with the game can still follow it without difficulty. I think it's worth checking out for fans and newbies alike, if you like a light fantasy story with lots of fighting.



## GHOST RIDER: TRAIL OF TEARS

**Format:** Hardcover Graphic Novel  
**Publisher:** Marvel  
**Writer:** Garth Ennis  
**Artist:** Clayton Craine  
**Price:** R199.00

**I'M NOT A GHOST** Rider fan, but the idea behind the sordid tale of revenge and justice is an interesting one. Alas, the recent movie did no real justice to it, maybe because it was aimed at a young audience. Such a concept should work better from a more mature perspective. And it does, if you have to use *Trail of Tears* as an example. Set during and after the American civil war, it starts with Lieutenant Travis Parham, a Confederate soldier who nearly gets killed in battle. He is rescued by Caleb, a former black slave who bought his own freedom and ekes out an existence with his family on his small piece of land. Caleb and Travis become good friend and when Travis leaves, he promises to come back. But when he does, he discovers that Caleb has been brutally slaughtered by a gang of former soldiers. Travis sets out to take revenge, but he's going after some really bad people. He'll also have to compete against a cloaked rider with flaming eyes... This is the work of Garth Ennis (*Preacher*) and Clayton Craine (*Curse of the Spawn*). It is simply excellent - well-written, brilliantly illustrated and a great read, even if you don't like *Ghost Rider*.



## WARHAMMER 40 000: BLOOD AND THUNDER (#1 OF 5)

**Format:** Comic Miniseries  
**Publisher:** Boom! Studios  
**Writer:** Abnett / Edginton  
**Artist:** Daniel Lapham  
**Price:** R39.95

**BLOOD AND THUNDER ISSUE 1** begins a new story in the Warhammer 40,000 line. This first issue of the miniseries sees the capture of Colonel Izraell of the 96th Tallarn Desert Raiders by a huge force of invading Space Orks on Demaris Tertiary. The comic is written with detailed descriptions of the Warhammer universe, and its realistic character dialogue, which puts you in the midst of the stinking greenskins as they spew insults and crabby remarks across the pages, (giving you a better insight into their mentality and nature). The comic delivers a gripping tale, and is sure to have you itching to learn more of the unfortunate Colonel's fate. In keeping with the Boom! Studios Warhammer range of comics, the artwork captures the creatures perfectly, and the battle scenes are grand and gory, reminiscent of the Warhammer wargames and PC games (*Warhammer Dawn of War* for example). "So get stuck in, Ladz! Get a shift on, you Gitz! Or Warboss Gorgutz will 'ave your innards for squig nosh!"



## ULTIMATE IRON MAN

**Format:** Graphic Novel  
**Publisher:** Marvel  
**Writer:** Orson Scott Card  
**Artist:** Andy Kubert  
**Price:** R180

**W**HEN IT COMES TO comic-book superheroes, Tony Stark a.k.a. Iron Man doesn't seem the most interesting of characters. Thanks to the literary finesse of four-time Hugo Award and two-time Nebula Award winner, Orson Scott Card, *Ultimate Iron Man* certainly changes that. Card is a talented science fiction writer with an eye for detail when it comes to writing for children, appropriate considering *Ultimate Iron Man* (the graphic novel collection of Issues 1 through 5) covers the origins of billionaire playboy Tony Stark and his affinity for technology.

The series reveals that Tony Stark's genius was caused by an accident while still in the womb. As a result, he has neural tissue throughout his body, as if his entire body is a brain, giving him incredible mental capacity. The side effects unfortunately include chronic pain akin to severe burns due to over-stimulation of the neural cells in his skin. Stark's father uses newly-invented biological armour to ease the pain.

What follows is a heart-felt if not harrowing tale of betrayal, revenge, greed and love as Stark grows up to become the head of Stark Industries. You see several iterations of the Iron Man suit in development and follow Stark as he refines both his technology and his social interactions with those around him. The story itself has its humour but also its dark side, especially with regards to a scene in which one kid convinces two others to kill themselves, then making it look like suicide to the adults around him.

It's a fantastic story, the kind that creates series fans by making the man and the hero a compelling, interesting character.



## THE SCREAM #1

**Format:** Comic Series  
**Publisher:** Dark Horse  
**Writer:** Peter David  
**Artist:** Bart Sears  
**Price:** R24.95

**T**HE SCREAM ISSUE ONE is a twisted, warped, insane, and slightly confusing whirlwind of dreams and illusions stirred into something that would otherwise be weak to average. This is also a fairly accurate description of the main character, Daniel Duncan, a pitiful postal worker suffering from nightmares, as well as some past experiences which he cannot recall. But are these nightmares only dreams, or is there more to his dementia? *The Scream* might not appeal to everyone. I personally am not really sure how I rate it so far, and so perhaps 'intriguing' is the best word for it. It's something different. The artwork reminds me of various other insane comic scripts from early 2000, and it really brings out the instability of Daniel Duncan and of his situation perfectly. I'd like to see how this story develops, and whether it keeps its nutty feel, or if it evolves (or should that be devolves) into another 'hero' comic. Let's see what Issue 2 brings to the table.



## ALL-STAR SUPERMAN #9

**Format:** Comic Series  
**Publisher:** DC  
**Writer:** Grant Morrison  
**Artist:** Frank Quitely  
**Price:** R26.00

**W**E'RE NOT TOO SURE when *Superman* as a comic got a reboot, but the number indicates earlier this year. It appears to be part of DC All-Star, a new label that brings some of the best comic writers and artists together with big DC characters. The creators do a one-shot that doesn't have to consider continuity, but has full access to the character's history. The point is to write iconic stories that people who aren't that familiar with the character (or haven't read any of the comics for a while) can still enjoy.

With that in mind, this issue makes a lot of sense. It combines the excellent talents of Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely (with Jamie Grant on colours), telling the story of Superman arriving back on Earth after a two month hiatus. He discovers that Krypton's two first astronauts found their way to Earth and they seem intent on restarting Krypton culture here. The art is excellent and the story is funny in a warm way. You also get to see Superman with a nose bleed. If this is any indication of what the All-Star series can deliver, we'll definitely be getting more of them.



## ANNIHILATION BOOK 1

**Format:** Graphic Novel  
**Publisher:** Marvel  
**Writer:** Various  
**Artist:** Various  
**Price:** R204.95

**A**NNIHILATION BOOK ONE COLLECTS two miniseries, *Drax the Destroyer* and *Annihilation: Nova*, as well as the *Annihilation* prologue, which appeared in comics early in 2007. It's the beginning of an epic story in the Marvel universe when an unknown alien race launches a full-scale attack on Xandar, all but obliterating the Nova Corps, except for a lone survivor who must now face the enemy and protect the Worldmind. Even with the book being composed by multiple people, I found it consistently stuck to the rather in-depth story, and with great artwork throughout and a steady flow of humorous one-liners to break the grim circumstances surrounding the characters. It was a thoroughly entertaining book, with a few of the top names in comics involved with it. *The Annihilation* story continues into a few more books after this, involving various other characters in the Marvel universe, tying them into the same story.



# FIGURINES



## Lara Croft 12"

**Series:** Player Select

**Accessories:** Assorted weapons, stand, 12 recorded voice messages

**RRP:** R349

**Supplier:** Cosmic Comics

**Website:** [www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com](http://www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com)

Broad: 160mm, Tall: 300mm



## Charlie Brown

**Series:** Peanuts

**Accessories:** Chair, megaphone, clipboard, stand

**RRP:** R109

**Supplier:** Cosmic Comics

**Website:** [www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com](http://www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com)

Broad: 55m, Tall: 130mm (excl. stand)



Broad: 135mm, Tall: 175mm

## Bizarro

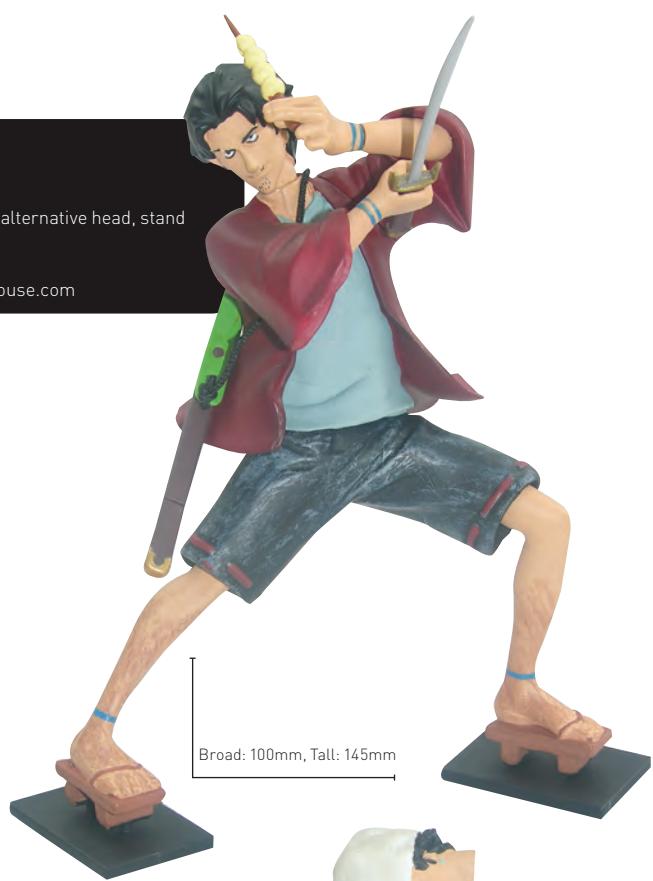
**Series:** Superman Last Son Series 1

**Accessories:** Stand

**RRP:** R149

**Supplier:** Cosmic Comics

**Website:** [www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com](http://www.comicsandtoyswarehouse.com)



Broad: 100mm, Tall: 145mm



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# RAVEN'S LOFT

## MANAGEMENT

By the time you read this, *Morningtide* previews will just about be getting underway. However, as this column was written quite a while before you read it, we have had no significant input from the Magic powers that be (read Wizards of the Coast) just yet. So, I'll be leaving a discussion of the second set in the Lorwyn block for next month. In the meantime, I'll touch briefly on issues of mana bases for decks, and also in-play considerations.

**N**O MATTER HOW PACKED with goodness your deck is, it is not going to perform if the mana base is not properly designed. With too little land you won't be able to cast your spells consistently enough, while with too much land you will find yourself not drawing into your spells often enough (mana screw and mana flood, respectively). Also, if you are playing a multicoloured deck and your mana proportions are incorrect, you will often find yourself with the right amount of the wrong kind (colour) of mana to reliably cast your spells (colour screw).

There are no fixed rules in this regard, but there are certainly important guidelines. Obviously, the average cost of your spells plays an important role: the higher it is, the more land you will need to include. This is why it is inadvisable to run too many expensive cards in your deck. In fact, this aspect is very important, so allow me a brief digression. (See box)

The vast majority of decks run between 21 and 24 lands, though occasionally you'll see a deck with 20 or even fewer lands - 25-land decks are actually not that uncommon. As well as the mana curve, a deck's type (aggressive, control, or combo) influences its mana requirements as well as its curve. Aggressive decks tend to want to swamp the board with cheap, fast threats, so the mana curve tends to be low. Also, because the individual cards (being cheap) tend to have lower power levels, it is important to include enough of them in the deck (referred to as having a sufficient "threat density"). As a result, such decks usually run the fewest lands, leaving space for the most spells. Control decks, on the other hand, rely on not missing their land drops. They need sufficient mana to be able to answer enemy threats, 'bullying' their opponents with superior mana and card advantage. (Bear in mind that to effectively make use of card advantage, you need the mana to support it; conversely, card advantage results in more consistent land drops and therefore better mana.) Mid-range control decks (decks that like to take the upper hand with incremental card advantage and mass removal effects, followed by heavy individual threats or "finishers") like to have the most mana, and it is these that often end up running up to 25 lands (almost half the deck!).

Colour distribution is as important as

### DANGEROUS CURVES AHEAD

Experienced players will often refer to a concept known as "mana curve" (sometimes referred to simply as "curve"). What this is, is a distribution of mana costs of spells in a deck. A deck with a "low curve" usually refers to one where the majority of spells are cheap; a "high curve" refers to a deck with many expensive spells. A deck with a "flat curve" has fairly even distributions of casting costs. In general, low curve decks tend to be more consistent (spells can be more reliably cast), while high curve decks tend to possess more power (big, expensive spells). Finding a balance is important. Although there are exceptions to every rule, it is generally best to have enough cheap cards to be able to play spells early, a heavy emphasis on mid-cost cards (usually around three mana) and a smattering of more expensive cards. Bear in mind that these benchmarks are relative: a Faerie deck, for example, will generally need three to four mana to be the top of its curve, and two mana to be the middle (and therefore emphasised).

overall numbers. Mono-coloured decks have the luxury of being able to afford a significant number of special lands, such as Quicksand or Urza's Factory for example, which yield colourless mana but also provide some other function. Two-coloured and multicoloured decks have less leeway in this regard, as coming up with enough of each colour of mana is vital. While this is a very nebulous ground, one common mistake to avoid is slavish reflection of spells' colour ratios in the mana base. What I mean by this is if you have a two-coloured deck in which one of your colours is secondary, accounting for a quarter of your spells or less. In such a situation, it is advisable to allocate more than just a quarter or less of its colour's lands to your mana base, as these will still contribute to generic costs for your other spells, while giving you a good chance of drawing into the required colour. In general, unless splashing with land fetchers, you don't want to go below a third of your total lands in one colour (in two-coloured decks, that is). Also, when deciding on your land colour balance, take into account whether any of your colours have heavy coloured costs (spells requiring two or more of a colour of mana), and try to avoid these in decks with three or more colours.

Next month I'll discuss in-game mana considerations and 'Scrying the Synergies' will return. **NAG**

**Alex Jelagin**



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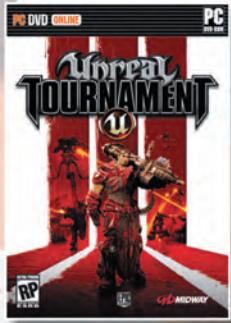
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